

Fiction

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THE
VAN GELDER PAPERS

AND OTHER SKETCHES

by
[- John Ruod -] pseud.

EDITED BY

J. T. Irving

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

MANY years ago a friend of mine, Mr. John Quod, prepared to write a history of Long Island. He was a man of thorough research, and did not confine his investigations to books alone. He examined the whole country from Coney Island to Montauk Point, and in particular, visited the spots therein rendered classic by the deeds of departed worthies.

The information thus derived he committed to paper—nor did he reject certain portions of it because they happened to be of an unusual character.

He did not live to complete his work. After his death his papers came into my hands ; and in compliance with his written request, I submit a portion of them to the public, by whom I hope they will be properly appreciated.

J. T. I.

TEUNIS VAN GELDER.

ABOUT thirty miles from the city of New York is a headland jutting out from Long Island Sound, fortified against the wash of the sea by huge boulders of rock. The banks of the shore are rough and rugged, and bear marks of the wear and tear of the waves. On the upland are tall trees, twisted into fantastic shapes by the force of the winds which sweep down the Long Island Sound. Between this promontory and the main-land is a land-locked bay, from whose borders a dense forest stretches off in various directions. The whole of this region is known by the name of Matinecock.

Matinecock is a place of great antiquity, and derives its name from an Indian tribe, which once held sway there. Like many places on Long Island, it is very much behind the rest of the world in matters of every-day experience; and being situated at the end of several very

crooked lanes, and hemmed in by water and sand beaches, it is no easy matter for the world to get at it.

In this neighborhood stands a large, rambling house, made up of gables and angles, with low roof, and overshadowed by lofty trees, which show the growth of centuries. It was originally built of squared logs, and was quadrangular in shape; but each successive owner added a wing or an elbow as it suited his fancy, until it seemed to be made up of odds and ends of architecture.

It had been founded nearly two hundred years ago by one Teunis Van Gelder, a stalwart soldier, who had followed the Dutch governor, Peter Stuyvesant, in his various campaigns. His portrait was in one of the rooms of the mansion. It represented a stark warrior with high cheek-bones, a mouth closed like a steel-trap, shaggy eyebrows, and a slash across the nose and part of the cheek as if from a sword-cut. The whole denoted an iron character.

He had been a staunch campaigner, and had stood by his old commander until the city of Nieuw Amsterdam capitulated to the English.

But he would not remain to see it under their domination. Bestowing on the invaders his malediction, he turned his back upon it forever, and retired to the fastnesses of Matinecock, where he took possession of a tract of land without inquiring who was the owner, erected a dwelling, and settled himself down to brood over his wrongs, and to meditate revenge.

Scarcely, however, had he got warm in his new nest, before he was beset by the myrmidons of Matinecock, led on by one Ebenezer Cock, a tall, hard-fisted pioneer of the New England breed. He claimed the ground on which the Dutchman had settled, by virtue of grant from the Indian owners of the soil. He flourished under Van Gelder's nose a parchment signed with the hieroglyphics of four sachems of the Matinecock tribe, by which, in consideration of three shirts and a shoe, the aforesaid sachems had conveyed to Ebenezer Cock, Eliphalet Frost, and Sampson Latting several thousand acres of land about Matinecock. This was too much for the gunpowder disposition of the warrior. He glanced grimly over the instrument, handed it back, swore that he would defend his rights against all the

“Cocks” in Christendom, and prepared for battle.

There is no doubt, however, that matters were compromised without recourse to arms. For, among the old records is a memorandum dated some years after, of his going “with his man Ryck and his square-nosed dogge to meet one Ebenezer Cock and others on the subject of his difficulties about the lands of Matinecock.” Whatever may have been the nature of the compromise, it is certain that Teunis Van Gelder retained his possessions, and transmitted them to his descendants.

Years passed while he yet lived there. He had grown gray, but not one whit less grim. The nature of his first reception rankled in his mind, and he held his neighbors at arm’s length. He kept a keen watch on all their movements, ready to show his teeth at any symptom of aggression. He looked upon their assault upon his domain as but a continuation of the wrongs which had driven him from his native city. He was ready to renew at any moment, in his own person, the war between Holland and England, and was equally ready to take to his bosom any one who avowed animosity to the English.

At that time, Captain Kidd, who had been buccaneering in various parts of the world, was reported to have arrived upon the Spanish Main. Rumors were also rife of his having been seen off the shores of Long Island. At one time he was off Montauk, heading for Gardiner's Bay; at another at Sandy Hook. These reports would die away, and then would be revived by the arrival of some vessel which had been chased by the redoubted "Rover" in the Caribbean Sea, and escaped by night setting in.

Late one afternoon, a tall, gaunt courier, mounted on a switch-tail mare, galloped through the county in hot haste. He brought news that Kidd had landed at Sag Harbor, and had rifled the town. Teunis Van Gelder rubbed his hands in keen satisfaction, and his eye lighted up with a venomous glow. He longed for a sight of the gallant freebooter, who was in a manner visiting upon the English commerce the wrongs which that nation had inflicted upon New Amsterdam.

That same night he was aroused from his sleep by a report of a gun booming across the water. He opened his casement and gazed

out. In the distance he observed lights dancing on the Sound, and apparently approaching the land. Shortly after there was a loud hail from the shore.

Teunis thrust his head out of the window, and answered by a bellow which might have been heard a mile. Guided by his voice a figure groped its way through the rocks and bushes, and stopped at his door.

The Dutchman was always on the lookout for plots and pitfalls, and was prepared for emergencies. He seized his gun and sallied out to meet the stranger. At the door stood a square-built, storm-beaten fellow, with a keen, watchful eye, a nose like a hawk's, and a mouth like a bull-dog's. He had a cutlass and a pair of pistols in his belt. As the veteran eyed him, and marked his gaunt, hard features, he felt that he was a kindred spirit, and his heart warmed to him. A few words sufficed to explain that he was second in command of Kidd's vessel, which was at anchor a short distance off and in want of supplies.

No news could have been more acceptable, no visitor more welcome. Teunis received the freebooter with open arms. His house and all

that he had were placed at his disposal. For several days groups of slashing fellows, armed to the teeth, were seen hanging about the premises carousing, shooting at marks, swearing hard, and making the neighborhood ring with their revelry. Teunis was in the thick of them, and as they related their encounters on the Indian Ocean, their hand-to-hand fights, and described the din and thunder of battle, the martial spirit of the veteran fairly broke out, and he swore to Kidd that he loved him as his own son.

During their sojourn the old house fairly rang with their carousals; and the fierce indomitable spirit of the Dutchman, and his bitter animosity to the English, so won upon the buccaneer, that under a solemn injunction of secrecy he took him into his confidence. His want of supplies was but a pretext. His vessel was laden with treasure, and he was in quest of a place to secrete it.

He suggested Matinecock Point, but Van Gelder shook his head, and cautioned him against the marauding spirit of the neighborhood. He declared that no honest man was safe there, that the inhabitants were a hybrid

race, a cross between the Quaker and the steel-trap, and that he might better trust the "Old Boy."

The freebooter shrugged his shoulders and remarked "that they might trust a worse person than the one just mentioned."

Teunis did not argue this last matter, but suggested Sand's Point as more remote and a safer place of deposit and added: "Ryck can show you the way."

"Agreed," replied the freebooter.

That night at midnight, several boats, heavily laden, set off. Van Gelder took a warm interest in the whole proceeding, accompanied them to the boats, and swore to watch over the treasure as if it were his own. He gave minute directions to Ryck, and stood by the shore until the boats were hid by the darkness.

Late at night Ryck returned, grinning with satisfaction at a broad gold piece which had been bestowed on him. He and his master were closeted together for more than an hour, and they parted with a caution to secrecy on the part of the latter, accompanied by a promise to curry his hide in case of his failure. As Teunis was very exemplary in keeping prom-

ises of this kind, Ryck remained true to his trust.

After the execution of Kidd it became known to the English government that he had communicated to Van Gelder the spot where his treasure was buried, and commissioners were appointed to examine him. They found the veteran in the extreme of age, gaunt, grisly, with dim eyes, like an old hound, and tottering up and down the walk in front of his house, supported by a withered negro, as decrepit and time-battered as his master. He heard their errand in savage silence. For a minute his energies rallied at the idea of an encounter with his old foes. It was but an expiring flash in the socket. He refused to give them any information, and turned his back upon them. Ryck shared all his master's antipathies, was equally taciturn, and they departed with their mission unaccomplished.

In a week from that time Teunis Van Gelder was gathered to his fathers.

Ryck, after languishing about the place for a few weeks, was found dead, sitting on his old master's grave.

The present owner of the house, a lineal de-

scendant of Teunis Van Gelder, is a little, dried-up fellow named Volkert, who seems to have grown up behind a pair of large round, rimmed spectacles, through which he views the world on a magnified scale.

The feuds and animosities which had existed between Teunis and his neighbors died with him ; and his present descendant is regarded by them as a kindly-disposed and well-meaning little man, somewhat peppery in temper and fantastic in his notions.

Much of his time was spent in out-of-the-way research and ferreting in the dust-holes of the past, from which he now and then would fish up some unsavory fact or useless piece of information. Those twilight portions of history, in which fable and fact are mingled, were his delight. He would travel a day's journey to visit a spot where a ghost had been seen, or a murder committed. He regarded a superannuated negro as a mine of legendary wealth ; and would hold him by the button by the hour to get at the truth of some incident recollected by the negro's great-grandmother, and detailed to him when he was a boy. In fact, his foibles were so well known, that every

vagabond in the country who could coin a plausible story, half romance and half fact, was sure of a welcome and a hearty meal in his kitchen.

He was not a little proud of his Dutch descent, and had small respect for any whose genealogy was not, like his own, lost in the fog which surrounded the Dutch dynasty.

His prime-minister and confidential adviser was a gray-headed, wrinkled negro named Zeb. He had been in his youth a sturdy fellow, but had dried up into an old codger, who looked like a frosted persimmon. He was tough and leathery, with a head as hard as adamant, and an obstinacy of disposition which required the full strength of his skull to keep it in. He had been born and bred on the place, and looked upon it and his master as his own property.

In early life he had been somewhat of a reprobate, so that his name and the gallows had frequently been coupled together in a very familiar manner; but he had disappointed all their prophecies, and in spite of his faults had steered clear of the halter.

As he grew old he became proportionably

steady in his habits, and his evil name peeled off. By the time he had become entirely useless and good-for-nothing, he had acquired quite a good character, and of late years he had never been known to swear when he had his own way, nor to get drunk at his own expense. He, however, retained the habit of shooting with the long bow, and the marvellous character of his stories was only exceeded by the pertinacity with which he stuck to them.

His memory was a perfect magazine of mysterious experiences; of encounters with spirits of every denomination; and the whole neighborhood of Dosoris, Matinecock, and Lattingtown, was with him a region noted for ghostly adventure. He could point out the very tree at Flagg Brook where Ralph Crafts had a friendly chat with the Old Boy, as is recounted among other curious and veracious narratives contained in this history; and he could show the large tulip tree at Dosoris under which Parson Woolsey had an encounter of a more hostile character with the same personage, in which he so exorcised the Old Boy in bad Latin, and raised such a din about his ears with hard Scripture texts, that he took to

flight, and never dared show his hoof there while the old clergyman lived.

Volkert Van Gelder pretended to turn an incredulous ear to these tales, when Zeb happened to speak of them in public; and put his old retainer off with a "pish"; but he always took occasion, when no one was by, to glean from him the full particulars. These were committed to writing, and stowed away in an ancient bookcase mounted with brass, which is a perfect repository of abstruse history; and as Matinecock and its neighborhood was more subject to visitations of this character than the rest of the world, the collection had become quite voluminous.

Zeb, however, had a crony in his own sphere, though not of his own color, equally versed in legendary lore. This was an old leathern-skinned fellow, with a red nose and a moist eye, of the name of Nick Wanzer.

Nick was born and bred in Matinecock. Many of his family had gone off to seek their fortunes in other parts of the world. Nick quoted the old saw, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," and stayed at home. He grew no richer, but in process of time he certainly acquired a

kind of moss-grown look, as if he were reaping the reward of his resolution.

He was addicted to strong drink and long stories; and by dint of constant indulgence in both, it became a matter of doubt whether his head or his stories were the toughest. He was usually to be met with on the borders of the Dosoris mill-pond, with a fishing-rod across his shoulder, or trudging along the sand bars of the Long Island Sound with a slouch-tail dog at his heels. He belonged to that class of worthies, one or two of whom hang about every country village, and who drift through life always in sight, living no one knows how or where, and who usually wind up their career by being found dead under a hedge or in some hay-mow.

In his youth he had been a harum-scarum fellow, a keen sportsman, and a persevering fisherman. Every rock, from the Stepping Stones to Lloyd's Neck, was as familiar to him as his own dwelling, and there was not a swamp, or nook of woodland, which he had not traversed with dog and gun.

He had been terribly harried in the early part of his life, by a termagant wife, but he

had at last deposited her in the Lattingtown churchyard, with a heavy stone over her, to commemorate her virtues and to keep her quiet.

He had been too much cowed by stringent petticoat government, ever to be the man that he was before his marriage; but it was a great weight off his mind to know that his wife was at rest, as well as himself. From that time he had been his own master, and loitered about the country, attending to everybody's business except his own. When the weather was fine and the Sound smooth he and Zeb passed whole mornings in a rickety boat, paddling about in search of fish. When the fish did not bite, the worthies might be descried upon one of the rocks at Matinecock, philosophizing over the past, while Nick's dog slept in the sunshine at their feet.

Of late Volkert had shown a strong yearning toward Nick. There was something in his good-for-nothing character which harmonized with the taste of Volkert, who had a weak spot in his affections for vagabonds. Nick, from a casual loiterer about the place, gradually became an appendage to it: running of errands,

catching a mess of fish, ringing the noses of his pigs, and making himself generally useful. But the great secret of their intimacy was a certain adventure which Nick had met with, many years previously, in which Teunis Van Gelder bore a conspicuous part. It did not speak very well for the old pioneer, but Volkert took a strange pride in the evil odor which hung around the skirts of his ancestor. He forthwith took Nick by the hand, and although the tale was scouted by many as the fabrication of Nick's drunken brain, Volkert cross-examined him faithfully, took the whole down in writing, decided it to be both plausible and true, and forthwith deposited it among the archives of his historic lore, from which I have drawn it. The adventure was as follows :

NICK WANZER'S ADVENTURE.

NICK had been passing an evening, many years since, at a husking frolic. Like most persons who are good for nothing else, he was in his element there. He was a lusty daredevil fellow then, ready for a fight or a frolic, and full of that rash, yet jovial recklessness which makes friends of the men, and plays the very deuce among the other sex. The party had been merry; and when the time came for breaking up, their merriment had become boisterous. Nick, overflowing with good cheer, took his leave of his host, shook hands with the mothers, kissed the prettiest of their daughters, and set out on his return to his own quarters.

The road was dark and gloomy, but he knew every inch of it. He was mellow with ale, apple brandy, and hard cider. He knew that he had to pass through a drear neighbor-

hood, and all the tales which he had heard of ghosts and hobgoblins and Kidd and old Teunis Van Gelder, were circulating freely through his brain, and, as he afterward acknowledged, what with the spirits within and the spirits without, his head was in somewhat of a turmoil.

He had a small boat drawn up in a creek near Matinecock Point, and as the road became somewhat unsteady as he proceeded, he determined to return home by water. Taking a short cut across the fields and floundering through a swamp or two, he finally reached the creek, drew out his boat, and pushed out into the Sound.

It was one of those quiet, still nights, when there was scarcely a ripple on the water; every star was plainly reflected on its surface, and the moon hung in the sky like a huge globe of silver.

Nick pulled lazily along, thinking at one time of a farmer's daughter with whom he had passed a few love passages behind the door; then of the ale and cider and apple brandy; then of the tales of Kidd, with which an old black fiddler had regaled them at intervals

during the evening ; until he had got the apple brandy and the farmer's daughter and Kidd and his treasure terribly jumbled together. He had been wondering where the freebooter could have put his money ; and whether it was in gold dust or in bars or coin ; and was in deep speculation as to whether it would be possible for him to discover it, dig it up, buy up the whole country round, and marry the girl just spoken of, when his attention was arrested by a loud hail.

“ Boat ahoy ! boat ahoy ! ”

The sound appeared to come from the Point at Matinecock, which was nearly half a mile distant ; and yet the voice seemed to be scarcely fifty feet off. Nick dropped his oars and listened.

“ B-o-a-t a-h-o-o-o-y ! ” again sounded across the water from the same direction, and yet apparently close at hand.

Nick looked about him in every direction, to ascertain if any other craft were in sight. The moon shone brilliantly, and its reflection rested like solid silver on the water ; not a thing was to be seen.

“ It's very strange,” thought he, “ but it

can't cost much to answer." So he put his hand to his mouth and gave the response: "Hallo!"

"Come ashore!" was the rejoinder in the same singular tone.

Nick did not altogether relish the summons, but he was a good-natured fellow, so he turned his boat toward the land. As he approached it, he saw a figure seated on a rock at the water's edge. He had supposed that the hail might have come from one of the neighbors who wanted a lift on his way home. But on nearer approach, he saw that the person on the rock was a stranger. By the light of the moon, he appeared to be a gaunt weather-beaten man, dressed in an outlandish rig such as was worn by seamen of the previous century. A dark hat was slouched over his face, and in his hand he held a club.

Nick eyed him for a moment, waiting for him to speak. But he sat croning over some sepulchral old sea ditty and glowering at Nick with a stony stare that made his flesh creep.

"Do you want me?" at last inquired Nick.

"Not I," replied the other in a gruff voice.

"You want me."

"You? I never laid eyes on you before," said Nick.

"I 've been at your elbow for the last half-hour; ever since you were thinking of Kidd's money."

"Whew-w!" Nick drew a long, low whistle, and laid his finger with a sort of drunken gravity on his nose.

"Then you know what I was thinking of?"

The other nodded.

"You 're not Kidd?"

The other shook his head.

"Nor Teunis Van Gelder?"

"No."

"Then you must be ——" Nick paused as he did not like to be disrespectful. "You must be ——"

"No matter who I am," replied the stranger.

"And you know where Kidd's money is?" inquired Nick.

The other nodded. "I was boatswain with him in the Adventure Galley, and a share of it is mine, and I keep an eye on it.

Nick pondered over this disclosure, as carefully as the muddled state of his brain would allow, and then said in a tone which was intended to be insinuating:

"If you and Kidd were shipmates, so long ago—so *very* long ago—you must be very old—or—or—or——" He hesitated.

"*Dead,*" said the other—"I am."

Nick was so much staggered by this blunt confession, and by having been thus unexpectedly brought face to face with a worthy,—so long defunct,—that he was at a loss what to say next.

At last he continued in the same insinuating tone:

"Perhaps, as you are dead, and as Kidd is dead, and there is no one alive who can take care of that money, it would be prudent for you to tell me where it is, so that I can keep a watch over it for you, when you are away."

The stranger gave vent to a low, sepulchral chuckle, as he replied:

"Dying does not make a man a fool."

Nick hastened to remove any wrong construction which might have been placed on his words by adding:

"Besides, come what may, you shall have your full share."

This last remark appeared to have some weight with the stranger. He hesitated—at last he said gravely:

"When I was alive, Mr. Wanzer, I was a man of honor. I promised never to tell where that gold is. Do you think that my being dead, alters the case?"

"Of course it does," said Nick; "and being already dead, as you say you are, I suppose that whatever is to happen to you has happened before this, so that a little mistake of that kind cannot hurt you much."

"Besides," added Nick, "as I said before, if I get the money, I would do something handsome for you—very handsome."

Nick's argument seemed to have some weight, for the other hesitated; at last he said:

"I don't mind Kidd so much. He's bad enough, and has some desperate fellows leagued with him; but the worst one of all is a hard-headed old Dutchman, one Teunis Van Gelder. Since he came into our quarters, he and Kidd have struck up a kind of partnership, and I've led a dog's life with them."

"But they can't use the money now," urged Nick.

"Can any miser use his money?" inquired the other; "yet no miser will part with it."

They like to know it 's there. I tell you," said he, striking his club hard on the ground, and speaking with much emphasis, "if they lost that money, they 'd make my quarters too hot to hold me."

Nick doubted whether that were possible; but he was too shrewd to mention his surmise; and besides he was unwilling to give up the chance of getting hold of the freebooter's treasure. So he asked:

"How can they find it out, unless you tell them? *I* would not."

The stranger seemed impressed by this promise.

"Can I rely on you, Mr. Wanzer?"

Nick was vociferous in vindication of his trustworthiness.

"But I must have my share," suggested the stranger. "I will do nothing without it."

"I have promised—and *have* it you shall, as soon as I finger the cash," replied Nick.

"Enough," answered the other. "Jump into your boat and pull for Sand's Point. I'll meet you there."

Nick waited for no second bidding. He sprang into his boat, pushed off from the shore,

and tugged lustily at the oars. The exercise had the effect of taking off some of the fumes of the liquor which he had drank, and of bringing him to his senses. When the boat grounded on the beach he found the stranger standing there with a shovel in his hand. He beckoned to Nick, who followed him until they came to where a huge boulder, known as Kidd's Rock, juts out from the Point. Here he paused, threw the shovel to Nick, and told him to dig.

Nick was disposed to parley ; but he felt the stony eyes fixed upon him, and his heart failed. He dug lustily, throwing out the sand in great shovelfuls. At last he struck something solid. Eagerly clearing away the dirt, he discovered a chest, secured by iron bands. He struck it with the shovel, and could hear the jingle of coin.

"Now, then," said the stranger, jumping into the hole and planting himself firmly on the chest. "There 's the money. Remember your promise. Now give me your hand on the bargain. It 's no bargain until we have crossed hands."

Nick extended his hand ; and already was that of the stranger reached to grasp it, when a loud, unearthly shout rang through the air.

Nick bounded from the hole at a single leap. The next instant, with a yell, two figures pounced upon the stranger in the pit. There were appalling cries and all the struggle of fierce encounter. They seemed to breathe fire and smoke at each other. At one time the fight raged in the hole, then it seemed to be up the bank near Kidd's Rock, and at another time in the air. In the moonlight Nick could see his friend hard beset; and he noticed that he suffered most from a grim old fellow in a cocked hat, with a slash across his nose. The other was square built, with pistols in his belt and a hanger at his side.

As Nick doubted how the battle would end, he quietly slipped into his boat, put off a short distance from the shore, and rested on his oars to watch the result.

In a few minutes he heard his name shouted from the beach; but he was too wary to be entrapped by any feeling of sympathy. He kept silent. The noise and uproar lasted for a short time longer, and then grew more and more distant, until it died away in the woods of Great Neck.

Nick now plied his oars vigorously, occasion-

ally pausing to listen. At the same time he was not free from an apprehension that on looking round he might find his late visitor stationed in the bow of his boat. But he reached Matine-cock in safety.

As he stepped ashore he was not a little surprised at discovering the stranger seated on a rock, apparently as cool as if nothing had happened; but on closer examination Nick observed that his dress was very much dilapidated, and his face begrimed with smut and dirt.

"I hope you 're not hurt," said he, in a tone which was meant to be sympathizing. "Those fellows were a little too much for you."

"I told you how it would be," said the other in a savage voice. "They got wind of it somehow."

"Who are they?"

"No matter."

"And the money?" inquired Nick.

"It's where you left it," replied the other. "You can get it if you like. You know our bargain. Give me your hand."

"Not until I handle the money," replied Nick. "And unless you are more lucky than

you have been to-night, I don't think you 'll put me in the way of doing it in a hurry."

"Mr. Wanzer," said the other, "do you mean to break our bargain?"

"Where 's the money?" demanded Nick in reply. "If you mean that I should take it while those two unpleasant gentlemen are mounting guard over it, you are much mistaken. I will see you to ——"; Nick hesitated how to finish his sentence. "And if you mean that I am to get it as I can, and be pestered by those fellows as long as I live,—I won't do it. Do you think I did not know old Teunis Van Gelder; I've seen his picture in the house too often. If he 's too much for you, I 'd like to know how I would come off in a scuffle with him; and if he and Kidd hunt in couples, I 'll have nothing to with it."

Nick struck his feet resolutely on the side of his boat to give emphasis to his words.

"You 're resolved?" said the other, sternly.

"I am," said Nick.

"Then take *this*—"

He raised his club to strike, but at that moment the same loud, unearthly yell, which had startled him before, rang through the air, and

two figures sprang toward them; one in a cocked hat, gray and grim, the other armed to the teeth. Before the club could descend, the stranger bounded from the rock and disappeared in the direction of Dosoris, the two following in full cry at his heels.

Nick hurried off and made the best of his way to his cabin, where he was found in the morning in a sleep so sound that some thought it might have been the result of deep potations, but which Nick himself attributed entirely to the excitement of the scene which he had gone through at Sand's Point and Matinecock.

In a note in the margin of the above manuscript, my respected relative remarked that Mr. Volkert Van Gelder, after full and mature investigation of the matter, had come to the conclusion that the adventure of Nick Wanzer was not a mere fabrication, but an actual occurrence.

He was forced to this conclusion by strong circumstantial evidence: for it was established beyond a doubt, that Wanzer was at a husking frolic on the very night alluded to; that he had set out for his home late, and somewhat involved in liquor; and also that he did own a

boat which usually lay in a creek at Peacock's Point.

Nick Wanzer himself pointed out the rock on which the stranger sat when he first made overtures to him ; and the situation of Kidd's Rock at Sand's Point is a matter of public notoriety. Under these circumstances Mr. Van Gelder felt that to express further doubt would be to cast an unjust imputation upon the character of a worthy and well-meaning citizen.

In commenting farther Mr. Van Gelder observed, with his usual discrimination and acuteness, that it was a very nice point to decide. That there certainly was strong corroborative evidence of the truth of the story ; and that although it was out of the usual course of things, yet Matinecock was an unusual kind of place, and events might transpire there which would not happen elsewhere. Under these circumstances, and after fully weighing the evidence, he thought that Wanzer's statement was worthy of implicit belief by all persons who are not stupidly incredulous.

DERRICK VAN DAM.

AMONG other documents, I came across a manuscript in the handwriting of Mr. Volkert Van Gelder, relating to the founder of that family at Matinecock. In it were set forth some of the troubles and annoyances which had beset that distinguished man, when in bitterness of spirit he turned his back upon his native city, and buried himself and his grief in the recesses of Matinecock.

The various aggressions of the pioneers who had preceded him, and who had endeavored to deprive him of his territories, rankled in his mind long after these difficulties had been adjusted. Ebenezer Cock, the ringleader in these acts of hostility, was a tall, stiff, raw-boned New Englander, with a face like parchment, a high nose, with eyes close together, and looking straight forward, like those of a lobster. He was one of your hard-headed, wordy disputants, who never become excited,

but are endowed with untiring perseverance and immeasurable wind.

To him Teunis Van Gelder bore a mortal antipathy, for he had not only laid claim to the land on which the Dutchman had settled, but had added the further insult of proving his claim to be just. The claim might have been borne, but the insult was intolerable. But if Ebenezer had powers of argument, the Dutchman had tenacity of purpose; and the warfare was carried on with cautious perseverance on one side, and on the other with vehement animosity, backed by an obstinacy which had never been known to yield.

In the midst of this turmoil he had no friend nor confidant, except his trusty negro Ryck, who had grown up with him, had followed him in battle, and now shared his exile. Together they used to patrol the place, keeping a watchful eye on the adjacent country, the old man recounting the glories of his native city, and thanking God that his only son was safe in Holland, where he could hear nothing spoken except his mother tongue, and was beyond the contaminating influence of the conquerors of his beloved town.

At this time the monotony of his life was interrupted by the arrival of Derrick Van Dam, a distant kinsman, who had recently returned from abroad. He was a gallant, stalwart fellow, of about three-and-twenty. He presented himself one day to the astonished eyes of Teunis and the admiring ones of Ryck, without notice or word of warning. He had been so long absent that the veteran did not recognize him, but, instinctively, was girding up his loins for battle, when the light, ringing laugh of his relative stole across his ear like a strain of long-forgotten music, touching some chord in his heart which had been long unstrung. The old man took him to his arms, and, with a feeling of almost childish desolation, wept upon his breast. The weakness was but momentary. The next moment his martial spirit revived; and he forthwith began to calculate how much strength this recruit would add to his garrison. To his kinsman he recounted his grievances, and described the persecutions of the myrmidons of the neighborhood, with so much earnestness, that the feelings of the young man were fairly enlisted, and he pledged himself to stand by his ancient friend

through thick and thin. He scouted the idea of defensive warfare, but suggested an immediate onslaught upon the enemy; that they should be smitten hip and thigh, and that particular attention should be shown to the indefatigable Ebenezer Cock. He proposed to sack the city where he dwelt. The dim eye of the veteran fairly glowed to find an ally so much after his own heart. He applauded the spirit which dictated the proposition, but suggested, as an obstacle, that there was no city to sack.

“What can we do? Has he no property?”

“Yes, large lands and crops.”

“Has he any sons? I ’ll challenge them!”

The veteran shook his head. “He has but one child—a daughter.”

“Is she handsome?”

Teunis replied that she was.

“Say no more!” was the prompt answer.

“I ’ll make love to her. The thing ’s settled!”

Teunis regarded his confederate with a shrewd eye. Whatever his thoughts may have been, he kept them to himself; and when his visitor retired, he rubbed his hands with an air of keen enjoyment as he bade him good-night.

No time was lost in carrying out their war-like resolutions ; and the success of the young man in making his mark was such that not a settler within ten miles but had heard of him. The women declared that he ought to be ashamed of himself, and the men that he ought to be hung. So vainglorious did old Teunis become, that he began to entertain vague ideas of laying claim to the whole territory between Matinecock and Flushing, and of expelling every Cock from the country !

While Derrick Van Dam was thus running riot and carrying dismay throughout the land, all idea of attack upon the domicile of Ebenezer seemed to have passed from his mind.

His hardihood, what a terrible fellow he was in a hand-to-hand encounter, what a fine-looking fellow he was too, his generosity to all about him, with the single exception of the Cock family, against whom he had vowed undying animosity, were the constant topics of talk in the sparsely settled district, and were not long in reaching the ears of the daughter and heir-ess of Ebenezer Cock.

Freelove, for such was her name, had grown up beneath the shadow of her father, and the

acid eye and warm temper of a step-mother. Under this combination of heat and cold she had ripened into a fine blooming maiden, warm of heart, somewhat quick of temper, and as unconscious of her charms as young beauties usually are. She was reputed to be one of the best brought-up girls on Long Island, having had every fault carefully held up to her disapprobation by her watchful step-mother, whose rough tongue was the terror of the country, and had rasped Ebenezer down to skin and bone.

When rumor carried the menaces of Derrick Van Dam to the ears of the maiden, she espoused the cause of her father with great vivacity. She vowed undying animosity against Teunis Van Gelder, was particularly bitter in her animadversions on his young ally, and usually concluded by stating that she would like to have an opportunity of giving him a piece of her mind. Whether the fear of encountering her sharp tongue prevented Derrick from carrying out his menace, I cannot say; but certain it is, that although he had occasionally seen the girl near her father's house, and had been not a little struck with her charms, he continued to keep aloof from her, having no

doubt learned, in the course of his foreign travel, that a woman's tongue is a weapon difficult to parry, especially if she be young and fair.

The girl soon had other matters to think of. She had grown up with that antipathy to the opposite sex, which is the peculiarity of young girls, and vowed that she would never marry; yet the fame of her beauty had extended far beyond her paternal domains, and several young vagabonds, of that class who usually admire young maidens, had made overtures for her hand. In reply to these, Ebenezer put on his spectacles, looked them full in the face, investigated the length of their purses, and returned a decided negative. Nor did he trouble his daughter by communicating their proposals.

At length a new candidate made his appearance. He was a stern, iron-strung soldier, who had been a hard fighter in the Indian wars. He was named Seth Pinchon, and was possessed of a large tract of land not far from Oyster Bay, consisting principally of sand bars and salt meadows, and prolific of clams and mosquitoes.

Seth Pinchon had been the right-hand man

of Captain John Underhill in many of his battles with the Indians both on the main-land and on Long Island. He had made himself memorable in the desperate fight with the Massapequa Indians, when their fort was destroyed and the power of the tribe broken. He was gaunt and rawboned, with a face seamed with scars, and a complexion hardened and tanned by exposure and service, until it had assumed both the color and consistency of sole-leather. He had also been an active partisan against the Dutch in the disputes between them and the English.

As long as the Dutch had maintained their domination over any part of the island, these broils had given him constant occupation, occasionally varied by his chastising a refractory Indian tribe which might have dared to maintain that their territories were their own.

However, the battle with the Massapeguas was the last great struggle of the Long Island Indians. The Dutch, too, were subdued, and Seth Pinchon retired to his lair at Oyster Bay, near the abode of his old commander John Underhill. His occupation being gone, he be-thought himself that he was becoming stricken

in years, and that it was high time to settle in life.

In one of his marauds he had fallen in with the daughter of Ebenezer Cock ; and although he was not prone to tender feelings, yet she had made such an impression upon him, that now, when the pressure of his various avocations was removed, her image rose in his mind as that of one fitted to be his future helpmeet. He set about the accomplishment of his object with that directness of purpose which was his great characteristic.

Having bestowed more than usual care upon his person, he mounted his horse and directed his course to the dwelling of Ebenezer Cock. It was a quiet, snug little farm-house, built upon the borders of a forest and commanding a wide view of fields of grain, which sloped off to the Sound. Every thing about it indicated ease and comfort, for Ebenezer was known to be a thrifty man.

As the cavalier rode up, Freelove met him at the door with a beaming smile. She had no suspicion that she was at the bottom of his visit, but the renown of the campaigner excited in her a desire to obtain from him that admira-

tion which the gentler sex is apt to crave from those who have made a name by courage and prowess in arms.

Seth Pinchon felt more embarrassment at her salutation than he would have done in storming a fortress. He dismounted and shambled into the house with a sideling gait, having more the air of a sheep-stealer than of one on his way to storm a fair lady's heart. Ebenezer Cock received him with cordiality, but with the erectness peculiar to his race. He heard his proposal with stern satisfaction, for he felt that amid the aggressions of Teunis Van Gelder, a son-in-law of a calibre like that of the staunch campaigner at his elbow would be a powerful auxiliary. He accepted his offer at once, and told him that he might consider the matter settled.

There was one, however, who heard the proposal and its acceptance with very different feelings. This was Freelove herself. She had not accompanied the soldier into the room, but had lingered at the door, and had overheard all that had passed. With a sinking heart she stole off to her own room, and kept out of sight until the heavy tramp of

hoofs told her that Seth Pinchon was departing. From the window she caught sight of his erect figure as he rode off.

In the form of the fair Freelove there was not a little spirit ; and every feeling was in arms at being thus unceremoniously disposed of. She determined that the grim warrior who had so little knowledge of female nature as to overlook her wishes in such a matter, should meet his match. She kept her own counsel, but maintained a keen watch over the movements of her father.

No sooner was it noised about that Seth Pinchon was to carry off the much-coveted prize, than the whole country from Flushing to Huntington was in a blaze of excitement. At last rumors of the intended wedding reached the ears of Derrick Van Dam, who had been for some time past ensconced in the fortress at Matinecock, hatching new projects of mischief. He forthwith sallied out for information ; nor was he long in learning that though betrothed to Seth Pinchon, the heart of the girl had little share in the matter. Had she been about to wed one of her own age, and to whom she went heart in hand, a spirit of high-bred chivalry, a

dash of which was mingled with his reckless character, would have prevented Derrick, notwithstanding his former menace, from interfering. As it was, he looked upon Seth Pinchon as little better than one of the corsairs, who were scouring the Mediterranean and Adriatic, and making prey of every fair maiden upon whom they could lay hands. He did not hesitate to declare his intention to take the field against his military rival, and to proclaim openly that Freelope was the fairest maiden on Long Island, and that he would marry her in spite of Seth Pinchon. This menace reached the ears of Freelope. At any other time it would have excited her ire; but matters were approaching a crisis with her, and the prospect of escape, even by being carried off by a scapegrace whom she had never seen, and whom she had denounced on all occasions, seemed a positive relief.

Still day after day slipped by. Rumors of Derrick's forays into the territories of the Cocks and the Lattings and the Frosts, the Wrights and the Weeks, his utter disregard of territorial rights and Indian grants, rang through the country; but no incursion had extended inside the dwelling of the Cocks, nor had there been

the slightest demonstration of a more tender character.

In the meantime Ebenezer Cock's wrath had increased to a white heat. He declared that Derrick was no better than a freebooter, and that he would have him hung if he got him in his power. Freelove's heart sank at these menaces. It was heavy, too, on her own account ; for the house was alive with the bustle of preparation for the wedding. Dried apples were hanging in festoons at the windows; pumpkins were brought in for pies; sheets, towelling, and all the various items of housewifery which denoted that a daughter and an heiress was to launch her bark in life, were about her. Amid all, she drooped and the bloom faded from her cheek.

In vain, well-meaning friends endeavored to cheer her by sounding the praises of her intended bridegroom. They told her how many Indians he had scalped, how many towns he had sacked, and recounted his numerous adventures by flood and field. Had these exploits been connected with a young and handsome person, it is not improbable that they might have added to his merits in her eyes ;

but as they brought to her mind only the gaunt, battle-worn exterior of Seth Pinchon, she turned away and said that he must be a cruel wretch. As the fated hour approached she would steal away and wander through the woods, endeavoring to plan some mode of escape, yet feeling that her plans and schemes must fail beneath the iron will of those who controlled her.

One afternoon, under the influence of these feelings, she wandered off, too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice whither she directed her steps. She had gone farther than usual and was about turning homeward when a twig, snapping beneath a footstep, caught her attention.

Indians at that time still lurked in the forests, and suspicious characters were known to be prowling around the settlements, living equally by plundering the savage and the white man. With a feeling of trepidation the girl turned in the direction of the sound, and beheld a young man standing within a few feet of her. He was gazing at her with a look of extreme surprise. The stranger raised his hat respectfully. "I think I have the honor of addressing Miss Cock?"

There was something in his air which inspired confidence ; and although he gazed at her with an expression of intense admiration, yet his tone was so respectful that she could not take offence. Who could he be? He was evidently a stranger in this part of the country. His appearance was not that of one brought up in the wilds of Long Island.

While these thoughts were passing through her mind, she was directing her steps homeward. The stranger hinted that improper characters were said to be prowling about, and suggested that he should escort her until she arrived within sight of her father's house. The girl seemed to acquiesce, and he took his station at her side. By degrees as they went on, their steps became more and more slow ; their conversation was carried on in a tone so low, that although there were no listeners, it was scarcely above a whisper. The color in the girl's cheek, too, came and went as she listened. Once or twice, in the course of the conversation, the name of Seth Pinchon passed between them. Gradually the stranger spoke more earnestly. Freelove did not look up ; her eyes were fixed on the ground. The manner of the other be-

came more urgent ; it was evident that he was making a passionate appeal. "In this hope," added he in conclusion to some remark, "I have lingered here from day to day, and until now I have watched in vain."

The girl ventured to steal a glance at the handsome eyes which were bent upon her own ; her heart throbbed at the gaze which they encountered. It was evident that the declarations which he had poured into her ear were genuine. None other could come from a person with such eyes ; but as yet the stranger had mentioned only his love, not his name ; it could do no harm to know it, even if she had to tell him that he must be disappointed in his hopes. So, with a fluttering heart and a faint voice, she said it was very odd that such a proposal should come from an entire stranger.

Her companion hesitated, and stood looking on the ground. At last he said sadly :

"I fear my name is not one that you will like to hear. I fear it now, a thousand times more than I did an hour ago ; for then I might have forgotten you, but now——"

He did not finish the sentence, but the sad gesture which accompanied his words, con-

vinced Freelove that if he lived to the age of Methuselah, her image would never be effaced from his bosom. She stood expecting his reply with some misgiving ; and yet with it was mingled an odd feeling, which she did not understand, but which she knew that she did not entertain for Seth.

“ Well,” said the stranger, drawing a long breath, “ I am Derrick Van Dam ! ”

A vague surmise that such might be the fact had already entered the mind of the girl, and for an instant her heart beat wildly ; the next moment she became deadly pale. Derrick seized her hand in both of his, and poured forth his protestations of devotion in language that might have melted half-a-dozen female hearts ; but there is something unaccountable in the ways of a woman, and he who would trace out the windings of her heart, must be a more profound philosopher than I am ; for, although but a short time before she had been hoping and longing for this very occurrence, as her last chance of escape, yet now, when Derrick stood before her, glowing with manly beauty far greater than she had expected, and had ventured to utter the words which she had been so

anxious to hear, she received him with an air of chilling reserve, and did not fail to let him know that his boast of wooing and winning her had reached her ears. Indeed, she carried her imprudence farther; for she concluded by telling him that he might look for a bride among those who held themselves more cheaply than she held herself.

Derrick's hopes, which had been high, were completely dashed by this sudden change of tone. He was a bold fellow where hard blows and round knocks were going on; but his heart was as tender as a child's. Her reception cut him to the quick; for all that he had of love, he had unconsciously bestowed upon her; and from dreaming and pondering over her perfections, he had become deeply involved. Here were all his day-dreams scattered to the winds. He did not understand the caprices of the little heart which was beating beneath the trim bodice before him; nor could he fathom the glance of the soft yet mischievous eye, which was already relenting, as it watched him. So he took her hand respectfully and said: "I suppose it was wrong to speak as I did, and you have done right to tell me so. I am a

stranger to you ; and yet I have loved you well—more than I can ever love any one else. I should not have spoken to you to-day, but I had heard that you were to be married soon—against your will,—and the time was so short that I dared not wait. It would have been better if I had.—Good-bye.”

He bent over her dimpled hand, and pressed it to his lips. As he did so the soft, warm fingers clasped his own. He looked up ; two dark eyes, moist with tears, were looking in his face.

“ Don’t go, don’t go,” was all that she could utter. The next moment she gave way to a paroxysm of tears and buried her face in her hands.

Derrick was beside himself. He reiterated his protestations of attachment ; he swore that he would never leave her ; he begged her to let him know the cause of her sorrow. If there was any thing she would like to have done, he would do it. If there was any one whom she would like to have exterminated, he would strangle him with pleasure ; she had but to say the word, for he was her most abject slave.

Freelove gradually became composed under

these assurances, and communicated the cause of her trouble—her approaching marriage with Seth Pinchon. She said that matters were progressing with alarming speed.

“We are to be married in a week.”

“A week?” exclaimed Derrick. “It’s an age. I’ll marry you in an hour.”

It cannot be denied that a smile of satisfaction brightened the face of the girl at the ardor of her youthful suitor; and that his headlong mode of courtship was playing the very deuce with the prospects of Seth Pinchon. It is useless to dwell upon a scene where both were of accord, and nothing but maiden modesty prevented the girl from yielding to the wishes of her new suitor. Still it was agreed between them, that this interview should be kept secret, and that they should meet on the following day, to devise means of thwarting her father and Seth. The propriety of making a formal demand of her hand was suggested by Derrick; but the girl seemed to fear that it might hasten her marriage with Seth. No conclusion was arrived at, except that she pledged herself to become Mrs. Van Dam at all hazards.

Matters being thus adjusted between them,

and sealed in due form, Derrick mounted his horse, which had been tied to a tree close at hand, and galloped off to Matinecock to take Teunis Van Gelder into his confidence, while the fair Freelove stole back to her home with a heart lighter than it had been since the shadow of Seth Pinchon had first darkened her threshold. Teunis listened to his confederate's story with a kind of paternal interest. A feeling of grim satisfaction pervaded his bosom at the idea of circumventing Ebenezer and his hard-fighting ally. Yet for a moment his eye was troubled, and placing his hard, brown finger on the arm of the young man, he looked full in his face as he said: "Remember! she is but a girl; you would not wrong her?"

"God forbid!" was the earnest reply.

"Then I'm with you. But you had better marry her without asking Ebenezer. It would save much trouble and a great waste of words. He's a very windy fellow."

This advice harmonized well with the wishes of Derrick, and he concluded to sleep on it and to make up his mind in the morning. The result of the night's deliberation was a determination to obtain a second interview with Free-

love, to reconnoitre the ground again, and to be guided by circumstances. In the meantime it was necessary to keep a watchful eye over Ebenezer and Seth; for at that time a species, of law, administered in later days by Judge Lynch, was in vogue on the borders; and Derrick felt that with Ebenezer and Seth as judge and jury, and himself as the culprit, the law would be rigidly enforced. He was, however, a person not apt to trouble himself about grievances which might never occur; and besides, there was something pleasant in the bare idea of invading the stronghold of the Cocks, and carrying off their treasure. He was raised above all paltry considerations of danger by the confessions which he had drawn from the fair Freelove on the previous day. He set out with a word of caution from Teunis to enter into no arguments with old Cock, and with a hint from Ryck "to keep his eyes skinned." He went on foot, the better to escape observation, and reached his place of destination without meeting a single person. For some time he kept in the woods near the house, watching for the girl. He was there at the appointed hour, yet she had not arrived. He cleared his throat;

he whistled, and made various demonstrations to attract her attention in case she were concealed in the neighborhood, but no Freelove appeared. He felt certain that something must be wrong, and resolved to approach the house. He stole cautiously up to a window, raised his head above the sill and looked in. As he did so, he encountered not the face of Freelove, but the grim, scarred visage of Seth Pinchon, who with instinctive readiness for emergencies, seized him by the throat ; at the same time he called out for assistance. Derrick was not to be captured so easily ; he returned the gripe of the veteran by a similar grasp on his throat, and for a moment it was a question who should strangle the other first. During the struggle Derrick dragged the old soldier out of the window and they fell to the ground, where the battle raged furiously, until Ebenezer, aroused by the noise, came to the assistance of his son-in-law, accompanied by one of his workmen ; and by the combined efforts of the three, Derrick was overpowered. He was taken into the house, confined in an upper room, and told that as he seemed so anxious to see the inside of the dwelling, he should have a chance.

The Indian fighter had been too watchful. He had observed the young man lurking about the premises for a day or two, and had been on the look-out for him. His boasts respecting his intended wife had reached his ears, and he had a welcome prepared for him whenever he should cross his path.

Ebenezer was not a little alarmed at the effect of this proceeding. He knew that Teunis was not a man to permit his friend to be seized with impunity, and his heart sank at the idea of the fury of the hard-headed Dutchman. But his grim confederate was as obdurate and impervious to fear as Teunis himself, and he insisted that Derrick should be kept in durance. He even suggested the propriety of hanging him on the spot. In his wars against the Indians he had acquired a habit of doing these things which he found it difficult to break. Nothing was settled, except that time should be taken to deliberate. Seth Pinchon, with that keen relish for strife which had become a part of his nature, penned a note to Teunis in characters as stiff and downright as his own blows, informing him that Derrick Van Dam had been detected in the act of breaking into

the house of Ebenezer Cock, and had been secured ; that as the crime was, by law, punishable with death, he presumed that he would be hung.

Having penned this epistle without the knowledge of Ebenezer, he dispatched it, and passed the rest of the day in quite a complacent state of mind at the idea of the uproar which the receipt of it would excite at Matinecock. He was right in his surmise as to the anger of the Dutchman ; but he had not calculated on his promptitude of action. No sooner had he read the letter, than he turned to the bearer of it and told him that he could not leave the place.

“ Here, Ryck, lock up this fellow in the corn-crib, and set the dog to watch him.”

A sharp whistle called to his side a dog with a square muzzle and eyes protruding from fat and ill-nature. He walked stiffly up, eyeing the prisoner and Ryck as if to ascertain the nature of his duty.

“ Do you think I can’t get out of that ? ” said the man, pointing to the place of confinement with a contemptuous sneer.

Teunis cast a glance of stern satisfaction at

the dog, gave vent to a grim chuckle, and told him to "try it."

This was all that passed ; and Ryck, accompanied by the dog as an auxiliary, hurried the prisoner to the corn-crib, bolting him in. The dog quietly stretched himself on the ground in front of it, and watched the prisoner through the bars, without winking or removing his eyes from him.

A hurried consultation was held with Ryck. Then the veteran and his ancient body-guard sallied out, and long before Seth Pinchon dreamed that his missive had reached its destination, Teunis was on his errand of retaliation. He was mounted on a tall, rawboned, hard-trotting steed, as headstrong and fiery as himself, while Ryck followed him on a strong-built cart-horse. They were both armed to the teeth. They took their course through Lattingtown, until they came to the remote region which is now known as Buckram. Their warlike appearance created no little consternation ; for, like the Ishmaelite of old, the Dutchman's hand was against every man. It was evident from their equipment that mischief was on foot ; and none knew where the blow would fall.

They did not draw rein until they arrived at the dwelling of Ebenezer Cock.

Seth Pinchon, not expecting so speedy a reply to his letter, was absent; but Ebenezer had descried them in the distance, and had a glimmering of the nature of the visit. He had no objection to meeting the veteran on the field of argument, but he had a mortal antipathy to bodily encounter, and had withdrawn, leaving the field to his adversary and his dwelling garrisoned by his wife, in whose powers he had such confidence, that his face lighted up with a sinister smile at the idea of the reception which would await the veteran when he ventured to assail the stronghold of the Cocks.

The loud summons of Teunis was answered by a shrill response, telling him to come in and say what he wanted.

Teunis was a man of few words, and his errand was a simple one. He produced the missive which he had received from Seth Pinchon, read it aloud, and said: "I am come in quest of Derrick Van Dam. Where is he?"

Mrs. Cock, like many of her sex, was better at vituperation than at argument, and as she

could not deny that she knew where the prisoner was, she did not attempt it, but opened the floodgates of her voice, and inundated her visitor with a torrent of that kind of eloquence which had been so effectual in quenching the spirit of Ebenezer, and of bringing the whole neighborhood under her domination.

For once she was at fault. Teunis eyed her in silence; he uttered not a word until she had got through, and paused from sheer want of breath. Then he told her plainly that what she had said was no answer to his question, which he now repeated.

“Where is Derrick Van Dam?”

Again the floodgates were opened, and out came another deluge; but her breath was giving out and the torrent was less impetuous. Another pause followed. Teunis was as cold as ever, but a little more resolute; his lips were compressed and his fingers griped the back of a chair. Again he asked the question. This time Mrs. Cock, put off her guard by the indifference of the soldier, fairly shook her fist in his face and told him that she knew where the gallows bird was; that he was in safe keeping, where all the Van Gelders in

creation could not reach him, and concluded by a sincere wish that he were hung.

The glowing eyes of the Dutchman showed that he was fairly roused; and when she paused, he told her that he must have either Derrick or herself; that he had come to rescue his friend, and that he was determined not to return empty-handed.

The response to this threat was prompt and warlike. She seized a broomstick, and dared the veteran to lay a finger on her.

Teunis was too chivalrous to make the attack himself, but turning to Ryck he gave orders for the assault.

Ryck immediately charged her in person. Resistance was vain. The broomstick was shattered across Ryck's grisly poll, but it might as well have encountered one of the boulders of Matinecock; and before Mrs. Cock had recovered her wits, she found herself mounted on horseback in front of Ryck, scouring across the country at headlong speed.

On a table lay the pen and ink, where Seth Pinchon had left them. Teunis wrote a few words, and left the paper on the table. Then mounting he followed Ryck.

No hen in the clutches of a hawk was ever more vociferous than Mrs. Cock, and as she was borne on, a stream of abuse and vituperation escaped her, which might have been heard for a mile. Her captors paid no regard to it, nor did they stop until she was landed at the dwelling of the veteran, very much dishevelled and bedraggled, and desperately out of temper at the hustling which she had received in her involuntary elopement.

Teunis found the prisoner whom he had left, gazing ruefully from between the bars of the corn-crib, and the dog assiduous in his attentions. The Dutchman's first business was to open the door and let the captive out, after which he told him that he might go to those who had sent him. This permission was accompanied by a kick in the rear to help him on his way.

Great was the dismay throughout Buckram and Lattingtown, when the news of the abduction of Mrs. Cock was bruited abroad. The desperate character of Van Gelder was already a matter of notoriety; but that he would have the hardihood to tackle Mrs. Cock, and carry her off to the fastnesses of Matinecock, had

never entered into the head of the most visionary of them all.

Ebenezer was in a ferment. He sent for his martial son-in-law, and they laid their heads together to discover some mode of circumventing their resolute foe. Seth Pinchon was for marching to the fortress, storming it, and putting the whole garrison to the sword; proceedings of that kind had been every-day matters with him in his forays into the Indian borders. The country was becoming dreadfully peaceful, and he looked upon a sharp encounter as an agreeable interlude in the monotony of his present life.

Ebenezer, however, suggested that it would not be the means of delivering Mrs. Cock.

"What will he do with her?" asked Seth.

"Hang her," replied Ebenezer. "Here's his letter," said he, producing the scrawl which Teunis had left on the table. "He swears that he will and he'll keep his word."

Seth Pinchon looked about him cautiously, and cast an inquiring eye on his intended father-in-law.

"Suppose he did?"

Ebenezer returned the look. For a moment

a wintry smile lighted up his face, then his features relapsed into their usual stiff expression, and he shook his head. "It won't do. We 'd be the talk of the whole country." But several times his eyes glistened as he thought of it; for there was something agreeable in the idea.

After much deliberation, but one course seemed open; this was to effect an exchange of prisoners, and to trust to chance to get Derrick again into their hands.

It was acceptable to neither; but was especially unpalatable to Seth, who stood out staunchly against it. Before deciding they determined to visit the fortress to see if it could be taken by assault. If that could not be done, it would be time enough to adopt the other alternative.

To this proposition Ebenezer was fain to assent. He told his daughter the nature of his errand, and cautioned her to be especially watchful over the prisoner. He committed to her charge the key of the chamber where Derrick was confined. He hinted that his daring character had been greatly exaggerated; that the most chicken-hearted fellow he had

ever met with, would not have submitted to imprisonment as tamely as Derrick had done. Having thus made all secure at home, he and Seth set out to beat up the quarters of their old foe.

When they came in sight of the fortress they descried the head of Teunis Van Gelder and the end of a blunderbuss protruding from a window in the second story ; and the black face and white eyes of Ryck, similarly supported, in a dormer-window in the roof, while the square-nosed dog patrolled in front of the house with the gravity of a sentinel. From a small window high up in the cockloft was to be seen the disconsolate face of Mrs. Cock, who, on the approach of her allies, waved some article of female attire from the window in token of her presence, and that she was ripe for assistance.

There was something so formidable in the attitude of the beleaguered forces, that Ebenezer Cock deemed it prudent, before venturing further, to parley ; and forthwith, tying a white rag to the end of a stick, he dispatched Seth Pinchon with it as a flag of truce.

Teunis Van Gelder maintained his attitude

of defiant caution. He made no offer to molest the ambassador until he arrived within speaking distance, and then commanded him to halt and disclose the nature of his errand.

"I come for Mrs. Mehitable Cock," said Seth Pinchon.

"Then you've come on a fool's errand," was the somewhat uncivil answer.

"If you don't give her up I'll take the law of you!" shouted Ebenezer from the distant spot where he had posted himself.

Teunis replied by striking a light, putting a pipe between his teeth, and glaring out from beneath the clouds of smoke.

In the meantime Seth Pinchon was reconnoitring the premises. Things certainly looked unpromising. The blunderbuss of the veteran covered him wherever he turned, and the dog followed him with his nose in unpleasant proximity to the calves of his legs, ready to commence hostilities on the slightest intimation from the war department. He slowly made the circuit of the house, the dog at his heels, and from each window as he proceeded the head of the veteran and the end of his blunderbuss appeared. Ryck, in the meantime, kept watch on the motions of Ebenezer.

Having satisfied himself that nothing could be done in the way of attack, Seth Pinchon determined to make an effort at intimidation.

"Look ye, sirrah!" said he, "we 've come for Mrs. Cock, and Mrs. Cock we will have!"

Teunis made no other reply than the volume of smoke which he puffed from his lips.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Seth, waxing angry, "I 'll storm the house!"

The Dutchman made no other reply than to bring the muzzle of his blunderbuss to bear upon the speaker.

Pinchon was evidently puzzled; for from what he knew of the iron character of the Dutchman, he felt sure that any such attempt would draw upon him a discharge of fire-arms from the besieged. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Cock, from her perch in the cockloft, was at one moment urging on the attack, at another bestowing torrents of abuse on her captors, and on the discreet pusillanimity of Ebenezer, who kept beyond range of the artillery.

While the perplexity of the besiegers was at its height, and Seth was on the point of suggesting an exchange of prisoners by way of compromise, all parties were startled by the

clatter of hoofs. The next moment the messenger who had delivered Seth's letter, dashed up at full gallop and shouting at the top of his lungs. He brought word that Derrick had escaped, and what was worse than all, had carried off Freelove with him.

The uproar was prodigious! Ebenezer forgot his fear of gunpowder, and rushed to communicate the news to Seth, and the two consulted in eager tones with the lady in the cockloft, while a loud bellow of satisfaction burst from the lips of Teunis in the second story, echoed in stentorian tones by Ryck from the dormer-window.

Seth was for starting off at once in pursuit, and would not listen to any thing which spoke of delay.

"But think of Mrs. Cock," put in Ebenezer.
"What about her?"

"Let him hang her!" was the rough answer.

Mrs. Cock caught the words, and her rejoinder was shrill and sharp; but Seth heeded it not. He was already on his way to Buckram. Deserted by his ally, Ebenezer was fain to make good his retreat. But Teunis hailed him:

"When Derrick is safe, I'll send back that

baggage in the cockloft. But if any harm happens to him, she shall swing, if there's a tree in Matinecock which will bear her weight. Be off now, or I 'll set the dog on you."

Ebenezer waited no second bidding, and disappeared, followed by his servant, leaving Mrs. Cock once more to the tender mercies of her captors, and brimful of wrath against her intended son-in-law.

Seth Pinchon and his intended father-in-law instituted a vigorous search for the fugitives; but they could learn nothing of them. Seth was furious with disappointment, and Ebenezer was inconsolable for the loss of his child.

At the end of a week, Teunis Van Gelder received a dispatch from Derrick. It was written from one of the towns on the Hudson River, and informed him of his marriage with the fair Freelove.

On the receipt of this, Mrs. Cock was discharged from custody, and once more returned to her domicile, from which she forthwith expelled Seth Pinchon. The warrior attempted to resist, but it was idle. He found that the tongue of Mrs. Cock was keener than any weapon that he had ever encountered; and after

several sharp skirmishes, in which he was signally defeated, he deserted the field.

As time rolled on Ebenezer's anger began to abate, and at last he sent an invitation to his son-in-law to bring his wife to Buckram. His wrath had been subsiding for some time, and became completely extinguished when news reached him that Derrick had unexpectedly inherited the property of Rip Van Dam, the great land-holder of Manhattan.

Derrick accepted the invitation; but there was little congeniality between him and his father-in-law, and the most of his time was passed with Teunis Van Gelder. After the return of the two to the city, the feud between Teunis and Ebenezer was revived, and was kept up until Teunis slept with his fathers.

RALPH CRAFT.

An Authentic History from the Van Gelder papers.

MANY years ago the village of Mosquito Cove was the home of one Ralph Craft; from whom are descended all the Crafts of the neighborhood.

Every place has its good-natured vagabond, who is hand in glove with everybody, and who hates work from the bottom of his heart.

This peculiarity had been in the Craft family for several generations, and as it descended from father to son it increased in degree, until it reached Ralph with tenfold intensity.

He looked upon regular work as an abomination, and but for the influence of a wife, who kept him in awe by the constant use of her tongue, and by the occasional application of other instruments of torture, would have passed through the world with much satisfaction to himself, though of little use to any one else.

As it was, he looked upon his home as a very pleasant place to roost in at night, but in the daytime he gave it as wide a berth as possible.

He could not keep away from it always—but the moment he crossed its threshold his soul sank within him, his voice dwindled to something between a whine and a whisper; his step became quiet and stealthy like that of a cat, and he always listened to the lectures of his wife as a dutiful and hen-pecked husband should—in silence; and was never known to utter a word against her, until she was out of hearing.

Every thing under her sway partook of the same general influence. Even the dunghill cock, who swelled and ruffled and crowed among the poultry while in the barn-yard, seemed to feel a weight upon his spirits when under her eye. His strut was quickened to a sidelong run, his tail was ducked down as if to dodge a blow, and his vociferous crow was frequently cut short in the middle.

It is but justice to Mrs. Craft to remark, that if good advice could have made a new man of her husband, she would have succeeded; for he never entered the house without being informed of his worthlessness, and that he was a disgrace

to his wife and her connections. To all this he had but one reply : " That he was, as he was born and that what was bred in the bone never came out at the flesh."

Like many persons of his description he was something of a sportsman, and whiled away much of his time, with gun and dog, in the neighboring woods hunting for game.

It happened one day, that he had been drinking a little too hard with a vagabond crony at the village tavern, and on returning home, urged on by the unwonted stimulus, he mustered courage enough to risk a wordy warfare with his helpmate.

The result was speedy and to the point ; he was thrust neck and heels from the house, and obliged to sue for terms.

Fortunately for him, the domestic larder was empty, and his wife made it a condition of the treaty of peace, that he should forthwith sally out and replenish the family stores with game. It was also hinted that if he returned empty-handed he would find the doors closed against him. But with an honesty which deserves all praise, she forbade his robbing any of the neighboring hen-roosts while on his errand.

Ralph, glad to make his peace on any terms that were not to be enforced by a broomstick, set about his task with alacrity.

He replenished his powder-horn, fitted a new flint to his gun, and whistling his dog "Grim" to his side, directed his steps towards Dosoris Lane.

It was still early in the day, and being a tolerable shot, he had no fears for the result, and was right happy at being obliged to undergo a penance so much in consonance with his own inclinations.

On entering the lane, he whistled Grim into the bushes, while he sauntered carelessly along, keeping a watchful eye on the brushwood, and occasionally glancing upward in hopes of catching sight of a pigeon in the tree-tops.

His search was fruitless; he reached the end of the lane without having started any thing except a black snake, which glided swiftly across his path and disappeared in the opposite brushwood.

"Comfortable this!" muttered he as he once more whistled for Grim, and, leaning on the end of his gun, ran his eye over the landscape.

At the foot of the hill on which he stood lay a small lake; and at the opposite side rose the

wood-clad peninsula now known as the West Island.

It was a beautiful and cloudless afternoon ; the lake lay in glassy smoothness, reflecting in its tranquil bosom the pines that darkened the Island. Not a ripple broke its calmness, except when, now and then, a fish, in pursuit of an insect, darted forth like a spark of silver, and fell glittering back into the pure element.

Nature, too, was in her rainbow garb, and wore a thousand tints which spoke the waning year, and which decked the forests with beauty for a season, only to mark more strongly their coming desolation.

Ralph's mind, however, was engrossed with other objects than the scenery. He ran his eye along the margin of the lake. Nothing was to be seen except a solitary kingfisher, perched upon a rail overhanging the water, and who, to judge from his moody air, had been sent out on the same errand as himself.

After a long and unsatisfactory survey, Ralph descended the hill, and as it was growing late, redoubled his speed and exertions. In vain, however, he scoured the borders of the pond and beat through all the swamps and

thickets of the neighborhood. Fate seemed against him, and just as the last rays of the setting sun disappeared from the sleeping waters of the Sound, he stood upon its beach as empty-handed as ever. Flocks of crows, high up in the air, were winging their flight towards a distant forest. Cattle were slowly wending their way to the farm-yards of their respective owners. The pale disc of the moon was just peeping above the eastern horizon, and several bats were beginning to flit about in the twilight.

Ralph seated himself disconsolately, supporting the sides of his head between his hands, with his eyes wistfully fixed upon the heaving Sound, as its gentle billows rippled over the pebbles at his feet.

Grim, too, seemed to sympathize with him; for whenever Ralph received a rough welcome at home, Grim was sure to partake of the same fare. He seemed aware of the nature of the errand on which they had been sent; he had done his utmost, and now stretched himself panting at the feet of his master.

At a short distance from the spot was a narrow strip of swamp, generally known as Flag Brook; and the idea suddenly occurred to Ralph

that as it was not yet dark, he might meet with something in that quarter.

With a great deal of alacrity, and something like hope, he set out, but had not gone far before the twilight deepened ; and the thick shadow of the woods, which bounded one side of the swamp, made the obscurity equal to that of the night. There was no longer any hope ; and forcing his way out of the bushes, and throwing his gun upon the ground, Ralph cast himself beside it and began to ruminate upon matters and things at home.

In the meantime the moon rose slowly in the heavens, throwing the shadow of the gigantic trees under which he lay, far out in a narrow field between him and the swamp.

"I wish the deuce had that wife of mine?" ejaculated he, as he turned on his elbow and thrust a hand in his breeches-pocket. "An empty stomach and hard names? Better sleep out all night!"

As he muttered this, he struck into a thoughtful whistle.

Suddenly Grim sprang up, and elevating his nose, commenced snuffing the air. Ralph grasped his gun and started to his feet.

“What is it? So ho! boy. So ho! boy. Curse the dog! I see nothing. So ho!”

Grim, however, did not advance, and when his master urged him on, he wagged his tail in acknowledgment of his instructions, and looking up in his face uttered a long, low whine. There was something in this that struck Ralph as mysterious, for the dog was generally as keen in the sport as himself. He leaned forward, straining his eyes, and as he did so caught sight of a rabbit squatting under a bush.

“Aha! My little fellow, you are mine!” exclaimed he, joyfully. “I’ll pass a peaceable night under my own roof yet!”

As he spoke he raised his gun to his cheek, but as he pulled the trigger the barrel was struck up, and the shot went pattering through the trees bringing down a shower of leaves.

“Let that rabbit alone!” exclaimed a rough voice at his elbow. “What business have you poaching on my preserves?”

Ralph turned round hot with anger; for with the exception of his wife, he feared neither devil nor man. Upon the upper rail of a fence, within a few feet of him, sat a little squat figure in Dutch small-clothes, of ample dimensions in

the skirts, and gathered tightly at the knees, which were garnished with silver buckles.

Ralph had been unaware of his presence; but there he sat, with his legs crossed, a gold-headed cane in his hand, and smoking a Dutch pipe as composedly as if he had been there an hour.

"Let that rabbit alone, I say!" repeated he with more emphasis.

Ralph was not a little startled at the outlandish rig of the little man; nor did he feel more easy when he encountered the fierce, positive eye which met his; but rallying his wits and assuming a look of bravado he tucked his arms akimbo and demanded of the other who he was and why he had interfered with his sport.

For some time the person thus addressed kept on puffing out clouds of smoke, which, for volume and density, completely amazed Ralph. At length, gravely blowing in his face a puff of smoke that nearly strangled him he answered in a more pacific tone: "I am a gentleman generally more talked of than known, Mr. Craft, and one who knows you better than you are aware of, and who, at a pinch, may aid

you. But tell me," added he in a more insinuating tone, "what strange freak has sent you hither sporting by moonlight?"

Ralph hesitated a moment; but he was a man of few secrets, and his affairs were the town-talk. The temper of his wife was as much the dread of the village as of himself, and it mattered little whether one person more or less was initiated in the secret of his troubles. So, without much parley, he frankly disclosed the nature of the errand on which he had been sent, and the necessity for his success.

"Mr. Craft," said the little man, extending one hand gravely towards him, whilst he pressed the other upon his heart, "I respect you—I sympathize with you—I will assist you."

Ralph eyed him dubiously. At length he said: "You are a small man, though corpulent."

"But I'm vigorous!" exclaimed the stranger, stretching out one leg and working his arms and shoulders, as if in the act of rowing, for the purpose of displaying his muscle, "vigorous, sir; very vigorous. I can do any thing to serve you, and I will! Name your request."

Ralph's eyes sparkled. He looked cautiously

about him, made two or three steps forward, and looked down the swamp, glanced behind the trees and up among the branches; then coming back he approached his mouth within two inches of the ear of the other and asked, with some hesitation, "Would you dare to tackle Mrs. Craft?"

"Mrs. Craft! Your wife?" exclaimed the other.

"The same," replied Ralph in a disappointed tone. "She is a tough one. I believe she'd thrash Old Nick himself."

"She'd find that difficult!" exclaimed the stranger, drawing a hard breath between his teeth, and tightening his coat about him.

"Not so difficult as you imagine," answered Ralph.

"Sir!" exclaimed the little man, springing from the fence, with his pipe in one hand and his cane in the other, and bridling up to Ralph—"Sir! you are not acquainted with the gentleman of whom you speak!"

"No," replied Ralph laconically, "but I am with Mrs. Craft."

The stranger's choler seemed rising; he thrust his pipe in his buttonhole, and paced rapidly

backward and forward. At length, stopping short, he thrust his cane emphatically in the ground and exclaimed: "I'll do it!"

"Mr. Craft," said he, "I have some business to attend to at this time, but will return in half an hour. If you will wait for me, I may do you a good turn that few others would."

Ralph knew that there was but little chance of his sleeping beneath his own roof, and being in no very particular hurry, promised.

His new acquaintance then turned abruptly from him, and walking across the field with a speed which, for one of his appearance, struck Ralph as marvellous, disappeared among the underwood that clustered about the head of Flag Brook, shrouding a huge bed of mud and slime.

"In the mire," thought Ralph; "his short legs won't help him much; but that's no affair of mine."

Ralph's first impulse, after his departure, was to reload his gun and look for his dog; but Grim was nowhere to be seen.

Supposing that he had gone off in pursuit of the rabbit, which had also disappeared, he gave himself no further thought about

him, but leaning against the fence, thrust his hands in his pockets, and amused himself, sometimes by wondering who the stranger could be, sometimes by whistling, or by watching the moon as it sailed through the deep blue arch over his head.

In half an hour, punctual to his word, the stranger was seen coming across the field.

He did not move with the alacrity with which he had set out; and upon his near approach, Ralph observed that his coat was nearly torn from his shoulders, his cocked hat was battered and bent in, and there were sundry rents in the nether extremity of his small clothes.

When he came up, he panted violently, as if exhausted by great exertion; and as he turned his face in the moonlight, it appeared striped and seamed with scratches like the bark of a young plum-tree. In his hand he held several partridges, which he flung towards Ralph.

"I have reflected upon your situation, Mr. Craft," said he, respectfully, "and find you are more to be pitied than blamed. Take these birds and make your peace with your wife—from my soul, I pity you."

"You seem to need that yourself," replied Ralph, compassionately; "How came your clothes so tattered, and your face so terribly scratched?"

"In the bushes," answered the other, crabbedly. "Here are your birds, take them, and ask me no further questions, for I am not in the humor to answer them. Go home to your wife. Good-night." As he spoke he turned on his heel, and ascending the hill, was lost in the thicket which shrouded Dosoris Lane. Ralph watched him until he was out of sight, then taking up his gift he whistled to Grim, but no dog came.

Knowing, however, that the animal would be sure to find his way to the village, he set out with a light step. Within a short distance of his dwelling he fell in with the cur, who seemed almost beside himself with joy at their meeting. Upon entering his kitchen Ralph was thunderstruck. In the centre stood Mrs. Craft, with a face like a ripened tomato, and a broken broomstick in her hand. Tables, chairs, stools, plates and dishes strewed the floor. Windows were broken, every thing bore indication of the utmost confusion, and nearly all the furniture was

in a state of dilapidation. Her story was soon told to her husband, and to a group of listening neighbors, who had assembled at the noise of the fracas.

About an hour before, a corpulent little gentleman, in a cocked hat and loose breeches, with a cane in his hand and a pipe in his buttonhole, had walked into the kitchen.

Seating himself in front of the fire, apparently as much at ease as if the house belonged to him, he lighted his pipe and with a few whiffs filled the room with smoke. Mrs. Craft was not the woman to put up with this, and accordingly the intruder was requested to desist. He replied that if the smoke was unpleasant to Mrs. Craft, she was at liberty to quit the house, as he should not cease until his pipe was out.

One word brought on another, until at length the matter came to blows, and a battle of that kind, which, by way of distinction, is called "royal," ensued. It was carried on with great vigor on both sides, but ended in the expulsion of the intruder, although nearly all the household furniture was demolished in the struggle. Mrs. Craft was in a violent taking, and was resolutely bent on having the law of the fellow, but

unfortunately for the success of her intention, he was never heard of from that day to this.

From the conversation which had taken place between himself and the little man, Ralph was enabled to give a pretty shrewd guess as to whom he might be. But he kept the secret to himself, for he feared that his character might suffer were it generally known that he had indulged in a sociable chat with a person so notoriously corrupt in his morals. And, moreover, he entertained a lurking feeling of gratitude towards one who had thus valorously enlisted in his behalf, and cared not to see him held up to the ridicule of the world.

He kept the secret until his wife was on her death-bed, when, by way of comforting her in her last moments, he informed her of the whole of that night's adventure, assuring her that she had gained a victory over no less a person than "Old Nick" himself, and that as she had proved to be more than a match for him when he intruded into her kitchen, there was little doubt but that he would be careful to keep out of her way for the future.

ZADOC TOWN.

From the papers of Mr. Wolfert Van Gelder.

D OSORIS LANE was a retired road, about a mile in length, in some parts running through open woodland, and in others so completely embowered in trees that twilight reigned there even at mid-day. There was a dreamy stillness about the place, which was apt to conjure up odd fancies in the mind of the loiterer, and he might have fancied himself in an old abbey, as he looked among the columned tree trunks, and the green arches overhead, until startled from his revery by the shrill cry of the blue-jaw, or the workmanlike tap of the woodpecker, as he scrambled around a tree trunk. Here and there a ray of sunlight, struggling through the overhanging branches, or the matted grape-vines which clambered over them, would stream across the road, or lie in golden flecks upon the dead leaves which strewed the ground.

Such at that time was Dosoris Lane, and even at the present day it retains much of its primitive character. The tide of travel, which has found its way to these regions, filling them with the hum of life, seems in a great measure to have spared this road. In earlier times, however, quiet and dreamlike as it seemed in the daytime, no spot was more astir than this after nightfall. Elves and spirits, and goblins of all denominations made it their haunt, and tales of unearthly doings which were taking place there, were rife throughout the country. At one time the ghost of a hard-drinking miller was seen galloping up and down the lane, astride of a huge demijohn which he was spurring, like a fiery charger, — no doubt a retaliation for the spur which it had so often applied to him in his lifetime — always disappearing at a great tree, at the foot of which he had drank himself to death, and which, in commemoration of that event, is called the drinking tree to this day.

At another time, the ghost of one Billy Cowles—who had died long before of asthma—was seen patrolling the place. Billy was buried in a graveyard near by; and it was generally rumored that he was in search of

breath, as he wheezed as he hurried along, and was always seen with his coat open, his shirt collar thrown back, and an old cravat in his hand.

These, and a number of other characters of the same kidney, made this vicinity their rendezvous, and many a strange prank and gambol was carried on there, until the place gained an evil name ; wayfarers began to take a wide circuit to avoid its ill-omened neighborhood ; the grass began to grow in its wagon track, and bold, indeed, was he who would venture to brave its perils after nightfall.

Just about this time, the place fell under the domination of one Parson Woolsey, a stern old clergyman and a large landholder, who looked narrowly after his own interests, and kept the whole country round in wholesome subjection. Neither ghost nor man was permitted to cross his path ; loud prayer exorcised the former, and a strong arm a long purse, and a rigid determination to enforce his own rights, kept the latter in his place.

The resolute old clergyman carried matters with a high hand until he died. He was buried under the shade of his own forests, where his

gravestone still stands half eaten away by time and overrun by weeds and briars, with a figure of the sturdy parson in full canonicals carved on the top, scowling from the midst of a bag wig, and apparently keeping a grim watch over the precincts.

After his death his lands passed into the hands of a more degenerate race, and once more the powers of the air were rampant.

Not a great while after this, a person of no small repute, named Zadoc Town, dwelt in this neighborhood. He had come there a few years before from parts unknown. He was a thin, keen man, with sharp features and a pair of restless black eyes, placed so close to his nose that they seemed intended to look straight forward and in no other direction. Musquito Cove had been a quiet place enough before his arrival, dozing away under the weight of its own antiquity, believing in nothing, and looking upon all its greatness as departed from the earth when Parson Woolsey was buried, and somewhat disposed to think, as all shrewd towns are apt to do, that what Musquito Cove did not know was not worth knowing, and what Musquito Cove did not pos-

sess was not worth possessing—unless it might be the money of other people. But when Zadoc came he stirred them up; he removed the veil from their eyes, and soon had the town in a turmoil. He took up his abode on a narrow by-road at a short distance from the village, in a precise-looking house with green shutters, in which two holes were cut like eyes, giving the house as keen and wide-awake a look as its owner.

Here he dwelt under the shadow of two poplar trees, and of a sister as keen and straightforward in aspect as himself, and for whose energetic spirit and sharp tongue, it was said, he had a very wary deference.

Be that as it may, any restraint that he suffered at home only rendered him more restless abroad. He was here and there, up to his eyes in every man's matters; he called public meetings; he demonstrated to them the size of the world outside of the village; he denounced Quakerdom, then the prevailing epidemic of the place; he talked of establishing schools, newspapers, periodicals, and banks; he failed in all! but succeeded in forming a fire insurance company, of which he was the presi-

dent, and had all the honor, while a tight-fisted old farmer was made treasurer, and kept the funds in a stone pot buried in his cellar, whence he dug them up and counted them every night after saying his prayers and just before going to bed.

It happened shortly after Zadoc had been installed in his new office, that he had been passing an afternoon with an old friend named Tommy Croft, who lived at Buckram. Tommy was a sturdy, weather-beaten veteran, resembling in strength and toughness one of the oaks of his own woods. In his youth he had been a double-jointed, hard-fisted fellow, who could cudgel it with any man of his inches. He was noted for believing in no law but what he carried in his own arm, and for doubting every one's opinion but his own; and although a Quaker, and of course a hater of broils, it was whispered that he and his cudgel were sometimes at variance, and that his cudgel did not always carry out the precepts that he advocated. Be that as it may, he was a favorite with all; for he was frank, open-hearted, and never stubborn, except when he could not have his own way, and as Zadoc, though restless and

persevering, was pliant, there was no collision between them—they were fast friends.

Zadoc had been passing the afternoon with his friend, and being tempted by Tommy's strong cider to linger longer than was his wont, the two sat gossiping at the door of the house, until the setting sun warned Zadoc that it was time to turn his face homeward. So taking his leave, he set out, and Tommy, with his cudgel under his arm, accompanied him several miles on his way. But at last the darkness, which increased as they went, rendering the road obscure, indicated to him that it was time to return, and bidding Zadoc "God-speed" he left him just as he was approaching the perilous regions of Dosoris.

Zadoc was pot-valiant just then, for at least a quart of Tommy's cider was buttoned under his jacket, distending his stomach and humming through his head, until he felt himself a match for the largest ghost that ever made Dosoris its haunt.

The principal scourge of this lane, of late years, had been the apparition of one Derrick Wilkinson, a hard-riding horse-jockey, who had broken his neck about twenty years before, and

was said to patrol the lane from one end to the other, and even to waylay wayfarers, and at times to cudgel them soundly, and at others to lead them into all sorts of wild adventures.

Among others, there was a tale current that he had beset a hard-headed old negro, named Knot, as he was reeling homeward from a husking frolic, somewhat the worse for his potations, and had led him a helter-skelter chase, all night long, through bush and brier; at one time dragging him through the swamp, at the head of Flag Brook, and at another, ducking him in the Dosoris mill-pond, paying no regard to his entreaties for rest, but as he became weary, plying him with a fiery liquor of such potency as to keep up his strength and courage, and make him as reckless as the goblin himself; and that the negro had been banged about in this rakehelly manner, until the distant crow of a cock gave warning of the approach of day. The ghost then dashed at a tremendous rate into the fastnesses of Boggy Swamp, and with a loud yell, disappeared, not forgetting to bestow a hearty thwack on the head of Knot, which left him senseless.

The story was laughed at by the young and

incredulous; but the older inhabitants, who had grown gray and wise with their years, placed implicit faith in the tale. They had lived long in the world, and had amassed a great fund of experience; and the most of them recollected that when they were boys, ghosts and hobgoblins were plenty. Moreover, it was certain that Knot was found on the morning after the adventures, lying at the foot of a large tree in Boggy Swamp, very drunk—no doubt from the effects of the miraculous liquor, and very much stupefied—doubtless from the effects of the blow.

From this time, Knot became a standard authority on all subjects relating to the unseen world. From that date, too, Dosoris became more of a wizard lane than ever.

Zadoc Town had been one of Knot's most virulent opponents, and had once or twice, in broad daylight, and under the wing of his sister, openly avowed his utter disbelief of the whole story, and had even said that he would like to catch Derrick stopping him, "that was all."

Returning Tommy's salutation in a tone as valiant as his own, he strode boldly into the

lane. It was not long, however, before the fumes of the cider began to evaporate, and as they disappeared, certain vague apprehensions took the place of the false courage which had so far supported him. All the tales which he had heard came crowding into his mind. He remembered, too, his own vaporings about ghosts and hobgoblins, and particularly about Derrick, and was not a little cowed at the recollection of the rash courage which he had showed in daylight. He kept a stealthy watch on the dim hedges at the roadside, and several times fancied that he saw a dusky figure flitting before him, but it always proved to be a bush or a rock. There was no sound to break the echo of his own footfall, except the creaking noise of the thousand insects which darkness had awakened into life. He cleared his throat loudly, and looked up towards the sky, but the interlaced branches shut out the stars, and overhead it looked as black as midnight. The sides of the road, too, were completely shut in by trees over-run by scrambling vines. He began to doubt whether it would not be better to retrace his steps, and spend the night under the hospitable roof of Tommy Croft; but he

recollected the shrill-tongued sister at home, who had set her face against vagabondizing and rantipoling of all kinds, under both of which heads she particularly classed all indulgencies which conduced to irregularity or lateness of hours. Zadoc thought of this. If he braved the dark lane, he might escape its perils; if he did not, a warm reception at home was certain. "Egad," thought he, "if I had but Betsey Town here to back me, I'd like to see Derrick tackle her! He'd catch a Tartar!"

Had he been elsewhere, he would have chuckled at the idea of such an encounter; but it was no time nor place for laughing, for he was at the very spot where the ghost was said to make its appearance, and he was debating in his mind as to the propriety of taking to his heels, when he was arrested by a voice at the roadside calling out: "Mr. Town, I'm waiting for you."

Zadoc's knees shook under him, but before he could rouse himself, he was jerked off his feet, and whisked over the fence by a power which he could not resist.

"Follow!" said the voice. Zadoc saw in front of him the dim outline of a figure gliding

swiftly through bush and brier, stopping at no impediment, and also felt himself impelled to follow. As they glided along through an opening in the wood he obtained a better view of his guide, and, to his horror, recognized the small jockey-cap, the lank, straight hair, and gray, glittering eyes of Derrick Wilkinson.

The cold perspiration stood on his forehead ; and his terror was not a little increased by hearing a heavy footstep following. He cast a stealthy glance over his shoulder and caught a glimpse of a figure as far behind as the other was before him. All hope of retreat was cut off, and, muttering a kind of rambling prayer, Zadoc followed the spectre until they came to a large tree at the head of Flag Brook. Here the ghost stopped, and, turning short around, glided up to Zadoc, and said, in a very respectful tone :

“ Mr. Town, in starlight and storm, many a weary night I ’ve waited for you. I ’m Derrick Wilkinson ! Be seated, sir.”

This confirmation of his previous knowledge was by no means consolatory. Derrick had always been a harem-scarem dare-devil during his lifetime, and Zadoc had strong misgivings

that death might not have improved his character. He recollected, too, Knot's adventure, and his heart died within him. He, however, slid to the ground, as directed, and at the same time attempted to express some satisfaction at the desire evinced for his company, but the words stuck in his throat, and he could only move his lips without speaking.

"I'm told you've got up in the world since I left it," said Derrick, by way of opening the conversation and of putting his companion at his ease.

Zadoc was wary, and as he did not understand the purport of the remark, he made a very non-committal answer.

"You've been a very busy man in the village," said the apparition; "you've made great changes."

"I've tried to do my duty," replied Zadoc, deprecatingly, at the same time endeavoring to change his position in such a way as to catch sight of the other figure, which had followed at his heels, and which he now observed under a tree close by, apparently ready to back his fellow goblin in any unearthly project which he might have on foot.

"You *have*, Mr. Town, and I honor you for it," replied Goblin, with strong emphasis. "I take a strong interest in the 'Cove' even yet. There were the Cowles and the Crofts and the Dyers and the Blarcoms and the Smiths and the Howlets, and dozens of others. They were rare boys in my day."

"They are all dead and gone," said Zadoc, as, beginning to feel less nervous, he grew more loquacious.

"I see most of them every day," replied Goblin. One or two of them have gone elsewhere; but I meet nearly all of them constantly. In fact, they sent me to see you."

Zadoc's hair began to bristle, for he had not imagined that this visitation was a concerted project of all the defunct worthies of the county. He made no reply, but sat with every sense on the alert, for he observed the attendant goblin drawing still nearer; and was apprehensive lest he might represent another of the departed worthies.

"Rumors of the great good that you have done have reached even us," continued the ghost in a tone which was intended to be insinuating,

but which, owing to the flimsy texture of its owner, was rather asthmatic.

Zadoc remained taciturn.

"We 've heard among other things, that you 've formed a company to insure against fire. Fire is a dreadful calamity, Mr. Town."

"Very," replied Zadoc.

"Fires are very prevalent where we are," said the ghost; "in fact, they are the greatest drawbacks to the place. We all suffer from them."

Zadoc moved uneasily in his seat.

"I think you insure against fire, Mr. Town; don't you?"

For a brief moment he felt that he was president of the insurance company, and here was a chance of turning an honest penny. He replied in the affirmative with some alacrity, and began to recapitulate the terms.

"Do you think, Mr. Town," said Goblin, assuming a winning tone, and endeavoring to coax up a smile on his sinister features, "that you could insure us?"

"You?"

"Yes, me," replied the Goblin, "and your other friends."

"Against what?" inquired Zadoc.

"Fire. It's very warm where we live," replied he; and I've leave of absence till cock-crow. We thought that if we could get insured during the night, we would snap our fingers when I go back. We don't mind money, and it would be a praiseworthy act on your part to outwit 'Old Scratch!' It tells greatly in a man's favor to annoy the old gentleman, and that *would*, I can assure you. I know him well."

Here was a dilemma; and Zadoc felt that his present position required adroit management.

"You don't mean to say," said he, evasively, "that all those respectable people,—very respectable people—have gone to the dev—"

"*Sir!*" said the Goblin, "don't be uncivil, *Sir!* Wherever they are, I mean to say that the climate does n't agree with them—being rather too tropical. I mean, too, that they want to be insured against *fire*. Do I make myself understood?"

There was something too positive in his manner to permit of further equivocation. Zadoc muttered something about his being unable to insure out of the county without consulting

the stockholders, and that he feared the risk was "extra-hazardous."

The goblin's eyes fairly glowed with fury as he said: "Refuse, if you dare! You are mine till cock-crow. Will you insure?"

Zadoc closed his eyes and muttered a prayer. The idea of getting the ill-will of the "Old Boy" by interfering between him and his property was not to be thought of for an instant, and he shook his head.

"Ha!" exclaimed the goblin, gnashing his teeth, "then here 's at you."

"And here 's at *thee*!" exclaimed a voice behind him. "Ghost or devil, take *that*!" At the same time a heavy cudgel was flourished in the air; it descended on what appeared to be the very head of the goblin, and cleaving through head and body hit hard against the ground. There was a bright flash, a puff of sulphurous smoke, and Zadoc found himself alone in the presence of his deliverer, Tommy Croft.

"Thee was hard beset, Zadoc," said Tommy, "and thee was wrong in saying goblins were agin natur'; but thee withstood that fellow as thee should. I'm very sorry, however, to hear

that so many of our respected friends have got into such unpleasant quarters. Thee won't laugh at Old Knot again. It's very sartain I never saw so unsolid a thing as that goblin. The stick went clean through him, as if he was smoke. Pah! he smells like burnt gunpowder. Come Zadoc, let's be moving."

Taking Zadoc under one arm and his trusty cudgel under the other, Tommy tramped through the woods and across the fields; nor did he relinquish the guardianship of his friend until he had seen him fairly housed beneath his own roof and under the vinegar eye of Sister Betsy, where he felt certain that neither goblin nor "Old Nick" himself would be hardy enough to disturb him.

RULIF VAN PELT.

ON one of those high ridges of land which overlook the Hudson, between Spuyten Duyvil Creek and Tarrytown, stood, long before the Revolution, a stone house, perched like an eagle's nest upon the very crest of the hill, and commanding a wide view of the river. Two or three gigantic elms flung their heavy branches over the roof, and sheltered it from the rays of the sun, and in front of the house, a lawn here and there, dotted with luxuriant trees, stretched off towards the river. On one side of it, a small brook stole through the grass until it reached a piece of broken woodland, when it took a sudden shoot downward, scampering and brawling through bush and brier, and over rock and tree trunk, until it made its way to the shore and buried itself in the river.

But rich and verdant as were the grounds,

the house itself was decayed and ruinous, shattered by time and storm, and bearing marks of neglect as well as of age. The fences were out of repair, and the garden overrun with weeds. Nor were the out-houses in better condition; for the large stone barn which stood at a short distance, surrounded by sheds and granaries, and which in former days had teemed with the produce of the farm, showed that time and neglect had done their work with it. Corn-cribs and hay-lofts were empty; doors and windows were unhung, or flapped to and fro in the wind, screeching like evil spirits, and every thing bore the appearance of utter neglect.

The owner of this spot was such as might have been expected from its appearance. He was a careless, thriftless young fellow, by the name of Rulif Van Pelt; as much noted through the country round for his reckless good-natured character, as for the strength of his arm and his headlong courage.

His father, Dick Van Pelt, had been a jovial old blade of the true Dutch school, thick in head and solid in fist, slow at argument but ready at a blow; and it was remarked that as

the stout, stalwart boy who had sprung from his loins increased in years and stature, he began to prove the legitimacy of his descent by the readiness with which in all cases of emergency he resorted to the latter of these two paternal peculiarities.

In process of time, however, Dick Van Pelt had been gathered to his fathers, and Rulif reigned in his stead. The old man, notwithstanding his social habits, had been hardworking and thrifty, had looked well to his worldly interests, and (to use the expression of his neighbors) had kept matters and things as they should be; but his son inherited none of his sire's prudence or forecast. He succeeded to the farm and the contents of his strong box. The latter he soon made way with, and the former went to wreck. The only members of his household were a vinegar-tongued housekeeper, who was cook, dairy-maid and factotum in-doors, and a grizzled old negro named Jacob, or, as the neighbors more usually called him, "Cobe," who had grown grey and wrinkled and wise under the Van Pelts of three generations. He hated work as much as his master, slept in the sunshine, aided and abetted Rulif

in all his mad pranks, and was a sore stumbling-block in the path of the housekeeper.

It may well be imagined, between the virulence of the one and the quiet encouragement of the other, that Rulif remained pretty much as nature had made him. But, although matters were sadly mismanaged at home, there was such a fund of generous feeling at the bottom of his disposition, that let him but once get beyond his own domains, at every hearth he had a welcome, and every hand was ready to greet him. He was their leader in frolic, and in moments of effervescence, their champion. At times, too, when the general harmony seemed likely to suffer from private feuds among the younger members of the community, if he found the parties to be headstrong, and impassive to argument, he not infrequently took the matter in his own hands and reduced them to reason by shaking them until no breath was left in their bodies.

"There goes Mad Rulif, God bless him!" was not an infrequent ejaculation of some honest old Dutchman, as he gazed after the brawny figure of the young man when he would gallop by; and there were younger and

brighter eyes, too, that stole anxious glances after him; and more than one little heart fluttered rapidly at the sound of his voice. Poor girls! they had all heard that his farm was running to waste, and that he was on the road to ruin! But what of that? Women are always tender-hearted. They pitied him because he was poor, and loved him because he was good for nothing. They thought only of finding their way into his heart; and left to their fathers the more matter-of-fact task of investigating his pockets.

Nor amid all this artillery of soft glances, deep, dark eyes, rich, pouting lips, and glowing cheeks, in which the blood came and went at every word that he spoke, did Rulif escape scathless; for at the distance of about two miles from his abode, was a quiet, drowsy-looking house, built of Dutch brick, with a low, broad piazza in front of it, and which seemed to have been nodding away for several centuries, beneath the shade of half a dozen large trees. In this house was one little window, from which a beautiful face might have been seen looking towards the road, at the time when Rulif usually passed. And certain it is,

that these times were not infrequent; for it became a matter of no little perplexity to the deep thinkers of Westchester County, to explain why it was that, whatever may have been Rulif's destination, whether north or south, east or west, he invariably contrived, both in going and coming, to pass this house.

There was one person, however, to whom it was no secret, and this person was Garret Stryker, the proprietor of that house, and of the broad acres which surrounded it. He was a stout, square-built little Dutchman, with a portly abdomen, and a stubborn disposition, who kept a keen eye upon his fair daughter Annetje, and in Rulif, snuffed a lover in the wind, with unerring sagacity. He gathered his chicken under his wing, and watched the bird of prey with unceasing vigilance. With lovers of all descriptions he had no sympathy; but a suitor with empty pockets was his utter abomination.

"There is Oloffte Van Giesen," he would sometimes remark to her; "if you must have a husband, take him. You'll be in luck if you get him. He's none of your roystering, harum-scarum, good-for-nothing fellows, who scamper

around the country meddling with everybody's concerns but their own. No, no; he has a head—all is solid there"; which last remark was undoubtedly true, for he was one of the most notoriously thick-headed fellows in the whole neighborhood.

His daughter listened with a downcast eye and a sinking heart. She made no reply, but was unconvinced; for Rulif had found no little favor in her eyes, and a single tone of his voice, or a single whisper of one of his wild pranks, scattered all recollections of paternal advice to the winds.

Rulif soon discovered that although the fair Annetje lent a willing ear to his words, her father watched him with a jealous eye; but it never entered into his head to conciliate the old man by setting about the cultivation of his farm in good earnest. He became wary, and his visits to the house were at long intervals, unless Garret Stryker happened to be absent; in which case, his horse had been more than once seen tied at the gate, and Annetje had been observed taking leave of him in a manner which the coy maidens of Westchester pronounced highly indecorous, and which they

warranted she would not have done had her father been present.

Things had remained in this way for some time, when Garret Stryker determined to take counsel upon the matter. He forthwith dispatched a message to one Abram Van Skaak, a near neighbor, and a man of profound sagacity, who had successfully brought up and married three unpromising daughters to opulent farmers of the neighborhood, whom they ruled with iron sway.

This council of sages was held under a large sycamore tree directly beneath Annetje's window. It was a puzzling case, and nearly a whole morning was consumed in deliberation; but they finally hit upon a project to drive Rulif from the field. This was to invite all the young people of the neighborhood to a tea-drinking at Garret's house, and among them, they had little doubt that one could be found to enter the lists against Rulif, and eventually, to carry captive the affections of Garret's wilful daughter. But with all his pent-up hostility, Garret dared not exclude Rulif from the number of his guests, for he knew that he was an iron-limbed fellow, of a

hot, fiery disposition, who, when fairly aroused, would stick at nothing to gain his ends or to pay off a grudge ; and Garret, being a prudent as well as a stubborn man, had quite as little relish for Rulif as an enemy as for a son-in-law.

On the following day an old negro, who was a sort of fixture to the place, was mounted on Stryker's old cart-horse, and sallied out on the important errand of giving the invitations, which in those unsophisticated days were by word of mouth. For miles around, that horse went at a gallop ; for Garret had cautioned the rider not to let the grass grow under his horse's feet ; and his messenger, construing this expression to suit his own taste, had been scouring in every direction, as if the devil were at his heels ; and returned at night with both the horse and himself fairly blown, but with the full consciousness of having forgotten none of the neighbors, except one, who, being rather poor than otherwise, had no right to be remembered.

It was on a fine, sunny afternoon, at that season of the year when autumn is just blending into winter, that Rulif, wholly unaware

how unwelcome a guest he would be, mounted his horse and sallied out to the mansion of the Strykers.

He had strange feelings as he rode along, but he manfully choked down his heart in its various attempts to throttle him; and as the best mode of putting an end to his suspense he scampered along at full gallop.

When the trees, which embowered the house, met his eye, he had an odd kind of misgiving, and for the first time in his life felt a dread of encountering the keen eye of his choleric host.

He was not the man, however, to give way to idle fancies; so, rousing himself, he dashed up to the door at full speed. He flung his reins to a negro, who stood ready to take his horse, and walked boldly into the house.

Garret's reception of his young guest was cordial; for his heart seemed to expand as his house filled, and his manners became particularly gracious, because at the moment when Rulif entered he observed that his daughter was apparently lending a willing ear to the soft whispers of Oloff Van Giesen, whom he had so repeatedly recommended to her especial consideration.

"The girl is listening to reason," thought he. "Annetje is making a fool of herself," thought Rulif, as his quick eye rested upon her and her companion.

It was not his nature to indulge long in suspicion; but as the evening waned, and he observed her still engaged with the solid-headed Oloff, he at first grew restless, then downright angry; and at last, in a spirit of pique, devoted himself to the blooming daughter of one Anthony Van Bummel, a neighboring farmer, who was well-to-do in the world, and who was one of his warmest admirers. His attentions in this quarter grew so marked, that the gossips who sat round the capacious fire-place and kept a watchful eye upon the doings of the young people, remarked that there might have been some mistake in the stories about Rulif and Annetje, and that another than she might become Mrs. Van Pelt.

The same idea may have straggled into the head of Garret Stryker, and dispersed the mists which had settled about his brain; or it may be that his nature expanded and grew genial under the influence of the foaming ale which, in large pewter flagons, circulated freely

among the guests; but certain it is, that as the night advanced, his manner towards Rulif relaxed. He urged him to indulge in potations of the same beverage of which he had partaken so freely, slapped him roughly but kindly on the shoulder, told him that his father was one of the finest old blades in the country, and that he was "a chip of the old block."

It was observed, however, that in proportion as her father's spirits rose, Annetje grew quiet. Her interest in the words of the admiring Oloffse seemed to decrease, and finally she withdrew from him, and seated herself in a window, where she was partially hid from view.

The change of manner in his host had a singular effect upon Rulif. He grew quiet, answered at random to the remarks of Miss Van Bummel, and finally fell into profound thought, from which he aroused himself to slap his thigh with such force that it sounded like the report of a pistol, and to walk straight out of the room in search of Garret, who had gone out a few moments before.

The precise nature of what passed between the two is not known, but Rulif soon returned; and with a quivering lip sought Annetje, who

was still sitting in the window, counting the stars and watching him out of the corner of her eye.

“Good-bye, Annetje,” said he, in a tremulous voice, “I ’m going.”

Annetje, had not forgotten how much of the evening he had passed in whispering in the ear of the rival beauty. She felt piqued and perhaps a little,—just the very least in the world,—jealous, so she made no reply.

“Annetje,” said Rulif, in an agitated tone, for his heart was full, and he was struck by her coldness, “will you not say good-night? Are you, too, against me? Your father has not treated me as he should have done, but I did not expect this from you.” He paused, as if hoping for an answer.

Annetje was proud, and although her little heart beat as if it would burst, she remained silent.

“Well, well,” said Rulif, drawing a long breath and taking her hand. “Perhaps it was folly for me to hope that one so bright and beautiful as you are could love me; but I did hope so, and I have been grievously punished for my presumption.”

He pressed her hand, dropped it; and before she could utter a word he was gone.

She sprang up to follow him, for pique, anger, jealousy, all, all were forgotten, but after taking one or two hasty steps, she drew back, and with a mingled feeling of irresolution and helplessness, sank into her seat, burying her face in her hands, while the tears gushed from between her fingers.

In no very gay humor Rulif groped his way into the stable and led out his horse, muttering curses against crabbed, crusty old fathers, who seemed to be put into the world only for the purpose of crossing promising young fellows like himself; and in his ebullition of anger, he did not spare Annetje herself, upon whom he bestowed every epithet indicating the extreme of fickleness and mutability.

He was in no humor to seek his home, and to listen to the homilies of his housekeeper; so he sprang upon his horse, drove his heels into his ribs, and dashed across the bridge which spanned a stream near the house, his horse's hoofs, as they struck the loose planks, echoing like thunder along the valley.

Down the narrow road, and up Valen-

tine's hill he galloped, the sparks flying from his horse's heels at every bound. Nor did he draw rein until he found himself upon the crest of a high hill, and felt the cool night breeze fanning his cheek.

There was not a cloud in the sky. He ran his eye over the landscape (for it was as light as day). Hill and valley, forest and farm, were distinctly visible, hemmed in by the distant waters of the Sound, which gleamed in the moonlight like a stream of silver. But Rulif saw none of this. His pause was but momentary; and another blow of his heels sent his horse scouring along the road at full gallop. So fierce and swift was his speed that the hot breath steamed from the nostrils of his horse in a light cloud. At one time he scudded on as if fleeing from the black shadow which flitted after him like a phantom horseman; at another he plunged into a by-road, so dark and shadowy that it seemed to be the yawning mouth of a cavern.

The coolness of the night air, however, gradually had the effect of calming his feelings, and as it grew later, he bethought him that it was time to seek his home.

When he arrived at this conclusion he was in a narrow road, shut in on both sides by a forest; and even the nearest way was long and circuitous, unless he chose to take a short cut through the woods. Though there was no path, he did not hesitate, but leaped his horse over the fence into the bushes. He was a thorough woodsman, and there was not a forest between King's Bridge and Sing Sing, or between the Hudson and the Sound, that he had not traversed with dog and gun, until each leafy nook was as familiar to him as his own door-yard. But still his road was not an easy one. At times the branch of a tree came in contact with his cheek. Then his horse reared and plunged as he encountered a bush; and finally was brought to a halt by the trunk of a large prostrate tree, which he obstinately refused to leap.

Rulif did not urge him on, but dropping the reins, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, broke out into a low, thoughtful whistle, while his horse commenced cropping the bushes.

"Well, nothing will be gained by sitting here," thought he. So, seeing the moonlight resting on an open space at a short distance, he

dismounted and made his way thither through the thick underwood.

He found himself in a small clearing filled with stumps and low bushes. In the centre of it stood a solitary tree, which had been blasted by lightning, and which now towered up like a hoary giant, while from its trunk a scathed limb projected like a skeleton arm. From beneath its roots the water of a spring gushed out, sparkling like diamonds, and lost itself in the grass. Rulif walked up to the tree, and scarcely conscious of what he did, seated himself on a log at its foot, and, with his cheeks resting between his hands, began to ponder over the events of the past evening. How long he sat there he did not know. He was aroused by hearing a plashing in the water close to him, but supposing it to be caused by a muskrat he did not look up. The sound was renewed, as if a person were pouring water from one vessel into another. Rulif now raised his head, and was not a little startled at seeing within a few feet of him a dried-up old man, attired in an antiquated Dutch garb, with a red woollen cap on his head, filling two flagons from the spring. As he finished, he paused and

fixed a dull, leaden stare upon Rulif, then taking up his vessels began to move off through the bushes.

His features were strange, and his whole garb and appearance were so grotesque and outlandish that Rulif determined to know more of him ; so he called out to him, but the stranger kept on his way without reply.

"The fellow's deaf ; but have a word with him I will. Devil of a pretty place and time of night for him to be prowling around the country with two jugs, and not a house within a mile."

Rulif strode rapidly after him ; but to his surprise he found that the pace of the other was as rapid as his own, and that increase his as he might, still the old man maintained the same relative distance between them. Rulif, however, was not the person to yield his point, and when the stranger left the clearing and plunged into the woods his pursuer followed close at his heels, although it was so dark that he could scarcely keep him in sight. Before long they came to another clearing, in the centre of which, to Rulif's great surprise, stood a strange-looking house. It

seemed very old and capacious; and, as far as he could judge, was built of brick, with high, narrow windows and huge, heavy doors; but he could form no idea of its exact size; for the shadows from the trees were so thick that its outline was lost in darkness.

"It 's very strange," muttered he. "I never saw nor heard of this house before; and I 'd be sworn that I knew every piece of brick and mortar within twenty miles."

He paused to examine it more closely, and then turned to look for his guide; but he was gone. His curiosity, however, was fully awakened. He knocked at the door; but there was no answer. He then pushed it open, and went boldly in. The hall was dark and dreary, and as the door swung shut with a noise that rang through the whole building, his heart sank. He hallooed loudly, but there was no reply except the echo of his own voice.

Groping his way along the wall, he came to a door, which he opened, and found himself in a large chamber, dimly lighted by the moon shining through the windows. A few embers were smouldering on the hearth,

giving an uncertain and ghost-like air to the room.

Rulif drew a chair in front of the fireplace, and throwing himself in it, stretched his feet to the fire and determined to make himself comfortable. He felt that he had done every thing necessary to deprive his entrance of a stealthy character, and having performed this duty, he thought that any further advances must come from his host. If he were inclined to be friendly, Rulif was the very man for him; "if not,"—Rulif did not complete the sentence, but looked down upon his brawny figure, and recollected that its ponderous strength had borne the brunt of much more rough usage than he was likely to receive at the hands of the stranger whom he had so recently seen.

Whilst he was indulging these reflections, his attention was attracted by the creaking of the door.

"Oh, ho! here he comes!" thought he, turning his chair so as to be in full sight of whoever should enter.

Scarcely had he done so, when a little antiquated man, so shrunken and withered that he

seemed to have half a dozen centuries on his shoulders, and attired in broad-skirted small-clothes, with huge buckles on his shoes, a large cocked hat upon his head, slowly entered, carrying in his hand a heavy brass candlestick, such as Rulif recollected to have seen copied in old pictures.

"Now for it," thought he. "I'll catch it."

But the other, although he looked carefully about the room, took no notice of him; and turning about bowed civilly to the door, which thereupon swung shut. Advancing to the table, he placed the candlestick on it, fixed a dull lack lustre-eye on Rulif, without uttering a word, and then turned to the door, bowed—the door swung open, the old man glided out, bowed, the door closed, and Rulif was left to his meditations.

"This is a wonderful house," muttered he, sitting up in his chair and rubbing his eyes. "Civility goes a great way in it. I never saw a door acknowledge it, unless there were a man behind it. I can't be dreaming," said he, staring about him. "No, there's the candlestick, which certainly was not there when I came in, and there's the door itself."

The more Rulif thought over the matter, the more uncomfortable he became. He now recollected that the old man glided rather than walked ; that his face was pale, and had a bluish tint like that of a corpse, and that his fingers were thin and bony, like the talons of a bird.

There was nothing in the appearance of the room to afford any clue to the character of the house. It was large and dreary, with heavy black rafters crossing it. In a corner stood a great lumbering clothes-press, and a chest bound with iron bands. In the centre was a ponderous oaken table, with quaintly carved legs, and dark from age. Around it stood eleven heavy chairs with high backs. On the top of each a grotesque face, wrought from the massive frame, grinned and gibbered at its neighbor across the table. It was one of these which Rulif had drawn from its place and now occupied. On the opposite side of the room were twelve pegs driven in the wall, and from each hung a long Dutch pipe. The chimney was long and gaping, like the mouth of a cavern ; the woodwork about it, from smoke, had become as dark as mahogany,

and was ornamented with fantastic figures, and strange goblin faces, which, with their puckered features and lolling tongues appeared to Rulif's excited imagination to be indulging devilish glee at his expense; and as he watched them more intently, they seemed endued with life. He could have sworn that they rolled their eyes and leered at him, and even that he heard a faint giggle. He coughed loudly, moved himself in the chair, and pushed it heavily across the floor.

"Tut, tut, this is nonsense," said he; "I'm no child to yield to it."

He endeavored to hum a tune, and to be at his ease; but it would not do; his voice gradually sank into silence, and he again found himself with his eyes riveted on the wood-work.

At last his restlessness became so intolerable that he resolved, come what might, he would rouse the house.

He looked towards the door; and to his astonishment perceived that each chair which but a moment before had been empty, was now occupied by a fantastic-looking fellow in cocked hat and old-fashioned smallclothes. In

front of each was a large pewter mug and a pipe; the former of which each applied to his lips, and bowed solemnly to his comrades, who returned his salute in the same formal, manner. Rulif's hair began to bristle, for he saw that all of them had the same bluish complexion which he had observed in his guide, and that their eyes alone seemed to have life; and these glowed like coals.

At length one of them, looking towards Rulif, said in a low, sepulchral tone: "Where 's Anthony Quackenboss? His seat is empty."

The others looked at the chair and shook their heads.

"He 'll come at two," said one.

"He 'll come at two!" echoed the others; and there was a dead silence.

"I suppose I 've got the absent gentleman's chair," thought Rulif; "and, upon my life, I 'd much rather he were in it than I. He can't come until two, and if I could conveniently absent myself, I 'd do it; for such a cutthroat-looking company I never beheld."

But no time was given him to escape from his dilemma, for in the midst of his reflections the door opened, and a tall, portly figure, but

with the same death-like complexion as the others, entered. He bowed formally to the company, and approaching the chair in which Rulif sat, lifted it to the table as if it were empty, and seated himself.

A chill, as of ice, shot through Rulif at the touch, and rallying his faculties he made a desperate leap, expecting to throw the stranger upon the table in front of him; but, to his amazement he encountered no obstacle except the table, with which he came violently in contact, leaving the new-comer in the very seat which he had abandoned.

"Thunder and lightning! I jumped through him!" exclaimed Van Pelt. With a single bound he was at the door, and seized the knob. He tugged, but it was as immovable as iron. He suddenly thought of the expedient of the old man, and stepping back bowed as politely as the flurry of his spirits would permit; still it remained closed. The idea of escape by the window then occurred to him, but that too, was fast; so, seeing no mode of egress, he crouched in a corner with his back against the wooden chest, ready to fight to the death. But the company did not seem to notice him.

"Where's Brom Van Hook?" inquired a tall, thin fellow, with a heavy eye and a hooked nose, who had hitherto smoked without speaking?

"He could n't come. He always was a sad dog," remarked one.

"He killed his wife, although it was never known."

A general "hist" silenced the speaker. "Dead men tell no tales."

"When did you see Teunis Kuypers?" inquired the tall man with a heavy eye. "Ah, was n't he a rare boy?"

"Ay, that he was," responded several, in a breath.

"He died in the year 1700," added a little sententious ghost, who had tiddled away at his mug until he had become maudlin. "I was at his funeral."

Rulif pricked up his ears, for the very farm which he now owned had once belonged to a man of that name, a roystering jovial fellow, who had died nearly a century previously.

"Teunis' father was a close-fisted old fellow, but he's paying for it. He won't be loose in a hundred years yet," added the other, shaking his head. "He buried his money—no one

can tell where." He sank his voice almost to a whisper, and placing his finger on the end of his nose, with a mysterious wink, added: "on his old farm are three beech trees growing together, with a rock wedged between their roots, and there he used to sit by the hour. Some think that his gold lies not far from them."

He shook his head mysteriously, and applying his pipe to his lips, smoked vehemently.

It may well be imagined that Rulif lost not a word of this. He was the owner of the identical farm described, and now learned a secret respecting it which he had never dreamed of.

He was in hopes of hearing something which might afford a further clue to the particular spot, but the speaker had evidently exhausted his knowledge, and the conversation took another turn.

By degrees, as the night waned, Rulif lost his awe of the ghostly company; but he, nevertheless, kept a wary eye on the door, determined to lose no opportunity of retreat. As he studied the faces around him he was struck by a kind of family resemblance

which these antiquated cavaliers bore to his own neighbors; and one in particular, a short, apoplectic-looking fellow, in an exceedingly broad-skirted suit of snuff-colored smallclothes, he would have sworn to have stepped out from a picture which hung in the hall of Annetje's own house. The conversation, too, related to the neighborhood. They spoke of places which he had known from boyhood, of farms, and of family names; but the persons to whom they referred were dead and gone a century ago; for he had a faint recollection of having heard his grandfather speak of them as old men even when he was a boy.

"It's very strange," thought he. "To hear these old fellows talk one would suppose that Yonkers was n't Yonkers; that I was n't Rulif Van Pelt, but some one else, and that my farm belonged to a wind-dried old curmudgeon who has been buried for a century. But I'll see them out."

This doughty resolution was not a little strengthened by hearing the crow of a distant cock. The sound caught the ears of the revelers; for they paused to listen, and their mirth, which had hitherto been of rather a boisterous

character for men of their age and constitution, gradually died away, and finally a dead silence reigned through the room. The gray of daylight was stealing in at the windows. As the light increased they seemed to grow more pale and thin, their outlines became more and more indistinct, until they appeared like shadowy forms of mist. The room, too, was fading. Its walls waxed more and more transparent; the massive chairs, the heavy woodwork, the great, gaping chimney-place were all melting away. At last distant objects became visible through them. Trees and bushes could be seen, at first, dimly, as if enveloped in fog; but still amid them could be distinguished the outlines of the room. The red sun rose over the hills. Rulif rubbed his eyes, and when he opened them again all was gone. In front of him was the tall forest and the blasted tree, with the little spring at its foot, and near him stood his horse cropping the grass. He turned to examine the great chest, but found that he was leaning against the trunk of a fallen tree.

He stared about him, and rubbed his eyes.

"Then it was all a dream, and old Garret

Stryker's ale has been humming in my head all night. But dream or not," said he, "I 'll look into the matter, and we 'll see who Teunis Kuypers was."

With this resolution formed, he mounted his horse and was not long in reaching home.

For weeks together he was missed from his usual haunts. No one could tell what had become of him. Cobe was the only man in the secret, and he looked wise and kept his own counsel. He merely informed the good people that Rulif knew what he was about, and that he'd astonish them one of these days—two valuable pieces of information, which each man hastened to circulate without loss of time. Rumors, too, got abroad that Rulif had suddenly betaken himself to the cultivation of his farm; for that such digging and delving as was going on there had not been heard of since Yonkers was a town or Westchester a county.

One thing, however, which puzzled them was, that the most of these indications of an agricultural taste were carried on in the woods, at the foot of trees where nothing could be planted, and among rocks where nothing could grow, or in dark out-of-the-way holes

and corners of the place, which the sun could never reach.

Day after day, Rulif, followed by his old body-guard, was seen to sally out, armed with pick-axe and spade, and to direct his course to the woods; and as these things continued, and no explanation was given, people began to point to their heads, and to whisper that all was not right there with Rulif.

These remarks were always made in a cautious manner, for whatever doubts might have existed as to his sanity, the vigor of his arm and the weight of his fist remained unquestioned, and several of those who mentioned their fears, at the same time suggested that the less the subject was spoken of the safer it might be; and at all events cautioned all persons against quoting them as authority.

Suddenly, however, a new cause of speculation arose. Cobe was seen to crack his knuckles, whistle to himself, and to shake his head with profound satisfaction. Then a total regeneration was observed in Rulif's farm. The house was enlarged and repaired, fences were mended, fields which had run to waste were reclaimed, horses and oxen were pur-

chased, the farm was well stocked, and in less than two months the whole place bore a thrifty appearance. Reports then got afloat of Rulif's having inherited a large property from some unknown relative, of whom no one had ever heard.

But more strange than all, Rulif was seen one fine afternoon, mounted on his black horse, directing his course to the abode of the fair Annetje Stryker. There was nothing stealthy or underhanded in his movements; his whole air and manner were those of a person who felt that he was of weight in the world. He rode leisurely up to the door, and walked in. Old Garret met him cordially, and with somewhat of deference, for the rumors which were in circulation had reached his ears, and Rulif had risen rapidly in his estimation. The fair Annetje, too, with a downcast eye and crimson cheek, saw him enter.

She had heard of his changed fortunes; she called to mind their last parting, and her heart died within her. Rulif recollected it, and, although he was ready to take her in his arms and tell her that he had forgiven all, yet there was still lingering a little feeling of pique, which

caused him to salute her coldly, while he requested a few moments private conversation with her father.

The minutes, however, lengthened into an hour before they reappeared. No sooner, however, did they re-enter the room than Rulif, without a word, saluted Annetje with a succession of hearty smacks, without the slightest sign of disapprobation from her father, who walked up and down the room in profound abstraction, muttering to himself:

“Mein Gott! one hundred thousand! Mein Gott! It's wonderful!”

The precise nature of the communication which produced such excitement in the mind of the usually sedate Garret Stryker does not appear. But it was such as to quiet all opposition to Rulif's designs upon Annetje, and to display his character in a light in which her father had never hitherto viewed it.

In a few weeks he led his blooming bride to the altar, and when at last the worthy Garret had pillowed his head among the tombstones, Rulif stepped into his house and acres. And as years rolled on half a dozen hard-fisted little Van Pelts had made their appearance, proving

their right to the name by their aptness at a quarrel, and by becoming the terror of the neighborhood through the strong marauding propensities, which they indulged at the expense of all the orchards and watermelon patches within a mile of their paternal domain.

As Rulif advanced in years he kept at home and grew sedate, and his opinions being always backed by a pocketful of ready money, were of great weight in the community. And, although the old rantipole spirit would sometimes ooze out and lead him to gallop off to a horse-race or a cock-fight, yet these were regarded merely as trifling vagaries, unpardonable indeed in a poor man, but which in a rich man should be winked at and forgotten.

And when in process of time he was laid in the family vault of the Van Pelts, a long address was made by Dominie Van Blarcon, who descanted at length upon the depth of his mind and pocket, to the great edification of his hearers, who retired sadly to their houses, thinking to themselves that verily a great man had departed from among them.

OBED GROOT.

Gord

NOT a great while after the Revolutionary war, a hard-drinking, hard-swearing, roystering gentleman by the name of Tom Floyd, lived in Queen's County, on Long Island. He kept his hounds and racers, and led a helter-skelter life. But his hard-riding, and hard-drinking came to a sudden end by his breaking his neck while following his dogs after a fox down the Cedar-Swamp road. He was taken up dead. But wild stories got in circulation about him : some said that the moment he fell dead the fox sprang up a bank, spread out a huge pair of wings, and flapped off in the air, and that there was the print of a cloven foot in the bank where he disappeared.

Above all, it was well attested that this hard-riding gentleman still kept up his hunting habits ; and on the anniversary of his death swept down the Cedar-Swamp road in his red

jockey-coat and yellow smallclothes, at the heels of his hounds; and woe betide the belated straggler who fell in his way on that night; for it was said that he preferred human game to all others.

On such occasions the good farmers and their wives, and daughters, and sons, and sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law, scampered off to bed and buried their heads beneath the bedclothes until the infernal crew had passed.

Indeed, it is said that in the haste and confusion with which they beat their retreat, it not unfrequently happened that the wrong person got into the wrong bed, which sometimes led to unpleasant consequences. Be that as it may, it was a well-authenticated fact that the tough old 'Squire still kept up his annual chase; and there was but one person in the whole country who doubted it, and dared to say so.

This was a man named Obed Groot, who lived on the Cedar-Swamp road, in a large house surrounded by rich fields and teeming barns. He was a keen, bitter fellow, with an eye like a rat's, a nose like a hawk's, and a mouth tight shut and with the corners turned so far down,

that there seemed to be some risk of their meeting under his chin, and beheading it.

He had set out in life with the determination to become rich, and to let nothing stand in its way. Shutting his eyes and ears to every thing that did not tend to that particular end, he succeeded. To be sure, he had not stopped to secure many friends by the way, but he did not need them.

Friends were always wanting something, or telling about some case of dreadful poverty, or of some fellow with a broken leg and starving family ; or, in other words, always endeavoring to circumvent the iron button that kept watch over the breeches-pocket in which lay his purse, and which button seemed to glare out at all the world like a great eye, defying any one to get the better of it.

Obed had once been married, and his wife had died many years before. Whether he had starved her to death, or whether she had died because her heart became frozen for want of any warmth in his, it matters not ; she died and he buried her decently, though some said he had hinted it was a pity that when she went she had forgotten to take with her a little girl

whom she had borne to him and had left behind. But the child was left ; and though neglected and almost forgotten, she throve ; and as she grew older, and sat and watched him with her earnest, solemn eyes, a feeling almost akin to fear would come over him. It was observed, too, that when he had driven a more than usually hard bargain, or one in which there had been a more than usual economy of honesty, he kept out of her way.

As time passed on, and Obed grew in years, and Esther—for so was his daughter called—grew in youth and beauty, he began to feel a kind of pride in her, and sometimes listened to her words and to her reading from the Good Book ; for he had become a man of wealth and note, and having secured a fair share of the treasures of earth, he felt inclined to make a small venture for those of heaven. It was said that once or twice, at her request, he had opened a small corner of his heart to an appeal for charity. 'T is true his acts were rather insignificant ; and afterward, as if frightened at what he had done, he buttoned his breeches-pocket tighter than ever. But still the ice had melted once, and there was hope that the time might come when there would be a general thaw.

It had been a hard year upon the farmers. Little rain had fallen ; their crops were cut off, and there was general distress throughout the country. Obed Groot, with his usual good-fortune, had escaped.

It chanced, at the time of which we speak, that he was sitting in his house, with one eye on his ledger and the other on the road, along which he saw a man approaching. As the man came near his gate, Obed raised the ledger eye also, and watched him with both. The man paused as if hesitating, and then came in. If there was hesitation in his manner at first, there was none now, for his tread was firm and strong, and his single knock at the door loud and bold.

“Come in,” said Obed.

The stranger entered. He was large in frame ; his tread denoted strength and resolution ; his eye was clear and frank ; his hair slightly streaked with gray ; his features heavy and massive, like those of a mastiff. He looked for a moment at Obed, who returned his look with an eye keen and watchful as that of a terrier, then nodded to him. “Good-morning, John Wakeman ; I’m glad to see you,” said

he. The words were kind; the tone was cold and harsh.

"I suppose you know my errand, sir," said the man, with some embarrassment of manner.

"I have not the least idea of it," replied Obed, tartly. He fidgeted as he spoke, for he knew it well.

"I came to ask for time to pay my debt to you. It has been a rough year; every thing seems to have gone wrong."

Obed's face grew hard as flint, and the corners of his mouth very nearly met under his chin. At last he snarled out: "That's the cry of every one just now."

"What can I do?" said the man.

"If you can't give money, give what you can. I'll take your farm; it's worth something," was the sharp reply.

"But if I part with it, how shall I live?"

"There are plenty of people in the world who don't own farms; live as they do," replied Obed.

"Mr. Groot," said the other, "my farm is but a small one, and not worth much; but it is all that I have, and the only home that I have for my wife. If I were alone, you should have

it this very hour. As it is, I will not see her turned out of doors if I can help it."

"Just as you please," replied Obed. "I would rather have the money. I have more land now than I can use."

As he spoke he waved his hand with some complacency towards the window which commanded a view of his own lands. The man drew a long breath as he looked over the wide fields, and ample barns and granaries filled to bursting, and thought of his own blighted harvest. He said nothing, however, but stood looking on the floor and apparently pondering something in his mind.

"Well," said he at length, "I suppose my errand here has been a waste of time?"

"Entirely so!"

The farmer stood for a moment as if he would have urged his plea once more, but at last turning to the door, he wished Obed good-morning in a quiet, civil tone, and went out.

Obed watched him until he had passed the gate, then turned to his ledger. "I was just making out that fellow's account when he came in. It's very odd."

As he spoke, there was a quiet footstep in

the room, and Esther came in and took her seat at his side. He was too much engrossed to notice her, but kept on adding up the figures and muttering to himself: "Everybody wants time. I never asked for time, and I'll not give it." His mouth closed, and the corners went down again. "I hate poor people," said he, poising his pen over the paper while he ran his eye up and down the page to see that he had omitted no item. "Ninety-five dollars and seventy-five cents. I verily believe that there was never a poor man who was an honest one—not one; I think it's absolutely wicked to be so confoundedly poor." He felt a hand pressing on his. He looked up; a pair of soft, remonstrating eyes were searching his.

"Well, Esther, what now?"

"Father, there was once One so poor that He knew not where to lay His head."

"Eh! what," said he, looking round and still holding his pen poised over the paper, "so poor as that; who was he?"

"One who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, pointed out the path to heaven shown by acts of loving kindness and mercy to man, and who at last died for us."

Tears came in the girl's eyes as she bent forward and looked earnestly in the sharp, hard face which peered so curiously in her own.

"Oh! ah!" said he, as the meaning of her words slowly made its way into his mind. "All very true, no doubt—a matter of religion. I never mix religion with business. You're a very good little girl, Esther. I'm glad that you read your Bible. Let me see! where was I?" He bent his nose to his ledger. "Ninety-five dollars and seventy-five cents."

The girl said nothing more, but left the room. Obed kept on with his nose as close to his ledger as ever, but he could not get on with his account; for every now and then the idea of how strange it must be to have no place to sleep in would come across his mind and bother him as he was adding up a column.

At last his mind wandered so much that he could not follow up his accounts, and he gave it up. He buttoned up his coat, went out, and strolled about his grounds. He looked into his cribs and barns and cattle-stalls. He was quite jocose with his workmen, but his merri-ment was hard and biting, and made their teeth chatter as they laughed. As it grew

later in the day, he went in and tackled his accounts again. By this time, the idle fancy which had bothered him before was completely out of his mind, and he soon found out the exact amount of John Wakeman's debt, and calculated the interest on it up to that very hour.

It was now late in the day, and was growing dark. Candles were lighted. Obed drank his tea, drew his chair to the fire, and toasted his feet, but he did every thing mechanically. His daughter took her usual seat at the fireside, but he did not notice her.

In truth, in going over those accounts, he had discovered that John Wakeman was in his debt more than he had imagined.

It was but a trifle, perhaps John knew it; but if he did not, or had forgotten it, it might not be amiss to refresh his memory. He got up and looked out of the window. Every thing outside was black as jet; and the wind was rising as if a storm were brewing. Still that "difference" in his account worried him.

"Father, you had better not go to John Wakeman's to-night," said the girl, abruptly.

The old man started, for her words were the echo of his thoughts.

“What put that into your head?” demanded he, testily.

“Were you not thinking of him?” asked the girl.

A denial was trembling on his lips; but he gulped it back before it had become a full-fledged lie. It’s no matter, child, what I was thinking of.”

But whatever might have been his intention he abandoned it and went to bed. Still through the night that “difference” perplexed him and made him toss and tumble in his sleep, until at last he got John Wakeman, his ledger, and the “difference” so mixed and jumbled up together that he could not tell whether that “difference” was John Wakeman or the ledger, or something else, or what it was. In the midst of this confusion he awoke, and found the daylight streaming in the room and the rain pattering on the window-panes.

All day long that “difference” haunted him; but the storm kept on. He flattened his nose against the window-panes, and blew his breath on them, and watched the sky; but still it stormed. Late in the evening the rain ceased, although the night looked black and

lowering. Obed could restrain himself no longer, and ordered his horse.

His daughter attempted to remonstrate; but he chid her sternly, and with his feeling sharpened, and his venom increased against his debtor by the opposition, he left the house.

"Guy! Mas' Obed!" exclaimed his negro Sam as he led out the horse. "A won'ful bad storm is coming! won'ful bad! Ef I was you, Mas' Obed, I'd stay to hum. It 's Tom Floyd's night. He 'll be out sure as my name 's Sam. Whoa! Pepper! Whoa! Even the ole hoss don't want to go."

"He 'll want to go before I 've done with him," said Obed, roughly.

As he spoke he brushed the hand of his old retainer from the bridle, and set out at a brisk trot.

Sam shook his head. "Mas' Obed don't b'lieve nuffin! But he 'll larn some day; he will."

Obed rode rapidly on; for the dark clouds were drifting across the sky, and the deep sighing of the wind showed that the storm was not over. The light of the young moon was completely hidden by the black masses which

swept over it. Although it was dark when he started, yet before he reached his place of destination he could scarcely see the road, and the rain began to fall. Pepper, however, kept steadily on, until a light gleaming from the window of a house at the roadside showed that he had reached his journey's end. Dismounting, he led his horse under a shed, and tied him there. Then groping his way to the house he knocked at the door.

"Come in!" said a voice from within.

Obed pulled up the latch and entered. John Wakeman was sitting at a table mending an old shoe. Near him sat his wife, a pale, anxious-looking woman. They both looked up as Obed entered, and a slight expression of pain crossed the man's face when he saw his visitor, and the woman cast a quick, apprehensive glance at her husband; but neither spoke.

The man instinctively pushed a chair towards Obed.

"I want no chair, John Wakeman," said Obed, gruffly, "nor do I want to waste words. I came about that account of mine. Here it is."

He extended the paper to the man, who took it and held it to the light.

"It 's right, I suppose?"

"Quite right."

"Well," said Obed, somewhat staggered by this prompt admission of a matter which he had supposed would be disputed, "I want my money."

As he spoke he planted himself firmly in the middle of the floor, and crossed his hands on the top of a chair, as if he intended to remain there until his claim was satisfied.

"Mr. Groot," said the man in a grave tone, "I will pay you as soon as I can. I have not the money; I have told you so before, I tell you so again." As he spoke he placed the shoe on the table, and came around to where Obed stood.

"My sheep have died. The storm has beaten my grain to the ground and destroyed the crop, and the drought has killed my corn—a whole year's labor lost. Others have suffered as well as I. The hand of the Almighty is upon us, and we must submit."

"I don't see what I have to do with that," replied Obed, testily. "That's a matter between you and Providence. I don't see why I should be mixed up with it; and I won't

be," said he, resolutely; "I won't be!" I did n't come here to hear sermons."

"Others, who have met with the same misfortune, have found indulgence," answered the man; "why should not I?"

"Because you are dealing with me and not with others," replied Obed, sharply. "I let no man dictate to me how I am to manage my affairs, and I follow no one's example. I've got a head," said he, tapping his forehead with his forefinger, "and I judge for myself. I will not be swindled out of my money. If you have not honesty enough to pay your debt, I'll make you." His lips quivered, and he shook his thin finger in the very face of the farmer.

The man's eyes flashed at the last words; the red blood flushed his cheeks, and he took a step forward. As he did so, he felt a touch on his arm. It was but the slight pressure of his wife's fingers, and even in his anger he turned to acknowledge the anxious yet affectionate glance which was fixed on him. "Do not fear, Mary," said he. "These things are hard to bear, and I forgot myself for a moment; but it's over now. Let him say his say, I'll bear it."

Obed turned sharply on the woman. "As to you," said he, tartly, "I must and will say—"

The farmer laid his hand heavily on his shoulder and looked in his face.

"Say nothing that may in any way reflect on *her*. She's a hard-working, loving woman. She bears her heavy lot without repining. The little sunshine which God sends into this house comes from her. Say nothing of her, for unless your looks belie you, you will say what I will not bear. To me she is all that is left of fortune or friends, and next to God I honor her."

There was a grave sternness in the tone and manner of the farmer as he spoke, and a kindling of the steady eye which warned Obed that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"As to your wife, I have no fault to find with her," replied he; "she owes me nothing. I never deal with women, never—never!"

"It's well," said the other, in the same grave manner. "And now, as you have said what you came for, and I have given you my answer, it is useless to speak further about the matter. The night is a rough one; will you stay here until the storm abates?"

"Stay here!" screamed Obed, fairly excited beyond his patience by the sturdy calmness of his debtor; "not a minute."

As he spoke he made for the door.

"Think again," said the farmer; "the night is dreadful, and there is wild work going on without."

"I'll go though the Devil himself were in my path!" As he spoke he pushed past the farmer, and opening the door, dashed out into the darkness. He was absent but a minute. When he returned, the farmer was still standing where he had left him.

"John Wakeman," said he, slowly and in a tone of concentrated wrath, "you've braved me this night. Now, mark my words, *I'll hunt you down!*"

The farmer eyed him calmly, and then raising his hand slowly, pointed upward, but said not a word.

"I suppose that means Providence again," said Obed with a snarl. Whenever a man loses money, it's always the work of Providence, but when he makes it, it's always his own. We'll see what that same Providence will do when you get me after you."

Again he left the house, but as he did so he turned and looked back. The man stood with the same unmoved expression, and his finger still pointed to heaven.

"Let him point," growled he. "If I do not teach him to pay his debts, may——" He did not finish his sentence, for he had reached the shed under which he had tied his horse. He led him out, and battling with the wind and rain, contrived to mount him, and turned his head homeward.

John Wakeman was right: it was a wild night. The wind swept down the valley in long gusts. The trees creaked and groaned, and the lightning flashed across the road. The sky was inky black, and the horse splashed heavily through the mud and water which filled the road. But Obed's venom was too much aroused and his bosom too full of vindictive plans for him to heed the turmoil around him. "Let him point to heaven," muttered he. "We'll see what it will do for him. If I don't hunt him down, may I——"

Again he paused, for his ear caught a sound which came sweeping down the valley, mingling strangely with the wailing of the storm.

Pepper too grew restive, and made one or two strong efforts to dash off.

"Dogs out on such a night as this," muttered he. "Whose can they be?"

For a moment his heart stood still, and a strange dread came over him, for he recollected the last words of his negro Sam, and associated them in his mind with the noises which were borne along on the wind. But Obed was not a man to yield to idle fancies. His life had been hard and practical, and with a feeling almost of contempt for himself, he turned his horse homeward. But Pepper had grown so restive that he could scarcely hold him; and he seemed half wild with terror. His pace was quickened to a gallop. His rider, however, was able to govern him, until the same wild cry again came ringing in his ears and close at hand. Obed glanced behind him. As he did so a bright flash of lightning flickered through the darkness and showed a pack of hounds coming down upon him, with lolling tongues and fiery eyes; and he also recognized the red coat and buck-skin smallclothes of Tom Floyd. Instinctively a prayer rose to his lips; but at the same moment his last words to John

Wakeman flashed through his mind and choked it in his throat.

It was no time for hesitation. He gave rein to his horse and dashed off at full speed. He assaulted the sides of Pepper with a shower of blows, and drove his heels into his ribs. For a moment he thought that he was gaining on his pursuers. But it was only a turn in the road which had shut out their cry. The next moment, nearer than before, he heard the deep baying of the phantom hounds amid the bellying of the storm, and loud above all the shout of the goblin horseman: "Hunt the miser down!"

Obed set his teeth; for amid his terrors, the feeling of resistance was strong. There was no need now to urge his horse; for, wild with fright and startled by the sharp flashes of lightning and the roar of the thunder, his speed was terrific. Down the Cedar-Swamp road toward the village of Mosquito Cove, Obed scoured along, the mud spattering behind him, his coat-tails fluttering in the wind. Pepper had got the very devil in him. Bit and bridle were but as threads to hold him in. At every yell of the hounds he seemed to leap a hun-

dred feet. Through the village, up the hill, across the fields of the Valentines, down Fresh-Pond Lane, through the swamp at the end of it, along the borders of the Sound, across West Beach, and over the upland of West Island, he tore along, and close at his heels, fast and furious, followed the goblin pack.

In the centre of West Island was a large house occupied by a hard-riding, jovial old fellow, who kept his hounds and lived with open heart and open hand.

The sound of the approaching chase roused him from his lair, and as Obed sped by he saw the old General—as he was called—standing at his window, with his nightcap in his hand, yelling like mad and cheering on the hunt.

He thought that he could hear sounds of mocking laughter and loud greetings interchanged between the goblin rider and the General. He made an effort to pull in his horse. He might as well have tried to rule a whirlwind. Down the bank he bounded, over the bridge, along the causeway, through the mud and water, across East Island, along East Beach, up Peacock's Lane, his hoofs striking fire at every step.

The stiff-sided inhabitants of Buckram were aroused by the fiendish shouts. They knew too well the sound of Tom Floyd's hounds, and Obed saw them scampering in every direction as he flitted by.

Through the valley of Buckram, across by Meadow Side, over the hills of Oyster Bay, along the upper road, and through the quiet town of Jericho, the hunt swept on, until the dark waste of Hempstead Plains opened in view. Full twenty miles had Obed come, and still no signs of flagging in his steed. And now before him stretched out a barren waste, dark, dreary, and almost without limit. He knew that far off to the east lay the village of Hempstead, and he hoped that the horse might turn in that direction. But he was disappointed. Pepper headed toward the east, and dashed across the plains until he came to the great south road.

Trees, houses, and fences, seen dimly in the dark, flitted past like shadows. Occasionally a deep bark would burst from the throat of some startled watch-dog as Obed fled by, changed into a yell of terror at the goblin pack which followed at his heels. The longer

Pepper ran the more furious grew his speed. Obed began to grow delirious. He yelled and screamed, now shrieking for help, now joining in the loud shouts of his pursuers. Thus he was carried on through South Oyster Bay and Babylon, when once more the horse turned to the north, and homeward. But Obed now was past all thought.

He was carried on he knew not how ; he cared not whither. Thought, feeling, fear, and sense were all gone. Instinctively he kept his seat. He knew that he was hurried through bushes and thickets, over ploughed fields and fences ; he felt that Pepper was his master, and that any further struggle was useless ; he yielded to his fate, and was whirled on as if in a dream ; he knew not how it ended, nor when nor where his horse stopped ; he had an indistinct idea of hearing voices about him, and of trampling feet, and anxious faces, and of being carried into a house ; but it was all confused.

When he came to himself he was in his own bed. There was a feeling of pain about his head, as if he had received a blow. His daughter was sitting at a table near him ; but still his mind was not clear. He looked around him

and muttered something about "that difference," and "hounds and Tom Floyd and Pepper," and while he was speaking he dropped off into a doze.

Late in the evening he awoke again. His head was clear, and his mind was ripe for business. He called his daughter to him.

"Where 's Pepper?"

Esther looked at him with a strange expression.

"He 's in the stable."

"Alive?"

"Yes; what should kill him?"

Obed had it on his tongue to tell his story, but he remembered that he had not figured to much advantage in the night's adventure; so he held his peace, although he did mutter, "That horse's wind and bottom are tremendous."

Again he sank back upon his pillow, and with half-closed eyes lay watching his daughter as she worked. As he watched her dreamy eyes and finely chiselled features, with the delicate and almost ethereal bloom on her cheek, and the glossy hair which rested on her brows, he thought that angels must look as she did.

"Angels have nothing of earth in them," said the girl.

Again that startling echo to his thoughts. Her eyes were fixed on his, and again that searching, unfathomable glance which made him cower.

At that moment he heard a firm strong tread on the doorstep, and a single loud bold knock at the door. He knew it well, although he could not hear the voice; and he knew well the step which was mounting the stairs without haste, deliberate and resolved; and it did not need the glance which he gave to tell him that John Wakeman was coming in.

"Ah! I know it's about that difference," muttered he, watching his visitor with eyes brilliant with feverish excitement.

John Wakeman wasted no words. "I've brought your money, sir," said he, taking out a well-worn leather purse.

He began to count out the money, on the table. The girl drew back and watched the two with an expression of the most intense sadness.

As he finished counting it, and Obed stretched out his hand to grasp it, the girl hastily rose and put her hand on his.

"O father! don't touch it. I know that it comes from a wrecked household, from a broken heart. Do not take it, I implore you, as you value all that is most dear to you. There is some wealth which comes coupled with a curse. All such, is that which is wrung from the heart-blood of the poor. Touch it not." She bowed her head over his hand, and held it clasped in both of hers.

"Take it away," said she, abruptly raising her head and speaking fast. "Tempt him not to his ruin."

The farmer looked steadily at her. There was an expression of honest admiration in his eyes, and for a moment his voice faltered.

"The money is justly his; I tempt him not. There is no wrong in my giving, nor in his receiving what is due to him."

"There, there! Esther! you hear him," said Obed, in a querulous tone; "he says it's mine."

The girl heeded him not. "The money is due indeed, and that you offered it is right; but is there nothing due from the rich to the poor? Is there not somewhere an account kept which shows that although the debtor may owe gold, the creditor owes mercy? I've

read it somewhere. John, now answer me? Has it not cost you sorrow, perhaps tears, to procure this money?"

"It 's honestly come by," said the man.

"I know that well," replied the girl, taking his hard hand. "But are there no tears on that gold?"

The man was silent. Esther stood looking in his face with the same grave earnestness.

"I 've heard of your misfortunes," said she. "Would not this aid you to get on again?"

"I cannot say but that it would," replied the man.

"You hear that, father?" said she, eagerly. "You know that he has lost nearly all he had on earth. You will let him have it until better times? Will you not?"

Obed turned testily on his bed. "The girl 's mad! Reach me that inkstand, John. I will write you a receipt for the money."

"Father——"

"Not a word more! not a single word! Hitherto you 've been a quiet, obedient girl. Od rat the girl, what 's in her?"

The farmer reached the pen and ink to the old man, who sat up in the bed, and wrote the

receipt. The other took it, folded it up, and put it in his pocket.

Before he went he approached Esther and took her hand. "I once had a daughter. Thank God she died before we came to be as poor as we are now. It was a heavy sorrow then ; but I can see the kindness of it now ; for it would have added a great weight to my heart to have dimmed her young life with the sorrows which overshadow mine. But if she had lived I feel that she would have been like you, and I could have asked nothing better for her."

He turned abruptly from her, and his heavy step was heard as he descended the stairs and left the house.

Once more Esther approached the bed. "Father, let me call him back before he is gone too far. I implore it for your sake ; I implore it for the love of heaven ! Oh ! you know not all that is depending on your words and acts this night."

Despite the sadness of her tone, Obed was fairly roused to wrath. "I tell you *no !* a thousand times *no !* Were the very hell-hounds which placed me here in this very room, I 'd tell you *no !* "

Esther drew back, and a mysterious change came over her as she spoke: "Now hear me yet again. It is not too late."

In her voice there was a tone of solemn sadness such as he had never heard before, and which filled his heart with foreboding; but the grim demon which had griped it so long still kept his hold there, and struggled hard to keep his holier feelings out. He shook his head.

She did not regard his gesture, but spoke on: "From my childhood until now I have been with you. I have seen you grow from poverty to wealth. You were an earnest, striving, frugal man; you struggled and fought your way on; you placed dollar by dollar, and as you saw your store increase your heart grew glad."

The old man chuckled in his bed, and rubbed his hands, his eye gleaming with satisfaction.

"Aye, girl, money is power; remember that, always remember that."

But she waved her hand and went on: "As your heart rejoiced it also grew hard. Its better feelings one by one were frozen out, until at last but one single overwhelming passion filled it; crushing to atoms all others, and sitting there alone—the sordid love of gain."

The old man made a gesture of impatience. "I'm no worse than my neighbors," muttered he ; "not a whit worse."

The girl still spoke : "I watched this feeling as it grew. Child as I was, I tried to battle against it, and turn you to better things. I hoped that as I should become older, and as years would give weight and influence to my words, I still might redeem the past and win you from your threatened destiny. It was a hard task, for all went well with you. When blight and mildew swept the lands of others, you gathered in your harvest rich and plentiful. No murrain touched your flocks. You turned to other ventures, and still success followed you. Wherever you went, whatever you did, the gifts of God were showered on you in rich profusion. But amid them all, your heart still clung to earth and *them*. It was never raised in gratitude to the Giver, nor did it dream of the object of the gift."

"You're wrong, my child, indeed you are," said the old man, with a tremulous voice. "I was grateful, indeed I was. I said my prayers *always*."

"Idle words, bearing no fruit. What acts of

yours ever showed that the blessings which you received were extended by you to others?" demanded the girl, sternly.

Obed muttered something about throwing away money on wasteful, improvident vagabonds.

"The poor were about you by hundreds, nay by thousands ; the earth was teeming with them. Their cry for help, by you ever unheeded, went up to heaven with the story of its suffering, with not one voice to say that you had sheltered, fed, or clothed. Such as sought you, you taunted with the calamities which Heaven had cast upon them, as crimes of their own committing. The result came. Your house was shunned by every one who felt that sorrow and suffering formed a claim to aid and sympathy from all who belonged to the great brotherhood of man. I was your child, and had an errand to fulfil. Time was waning fast ; the frosts of age were on your brow. What if eternity were reached and found you lost to mercy and to God !"

"Who are you," demanded the old man, sitting up in his bed, "that you speak thus to me ?"

"As yet your child !"

"I was afraid that you had forgotten it," replied he ; "I 'll have no more of this."

The girl looked sadly in his face. "Be it as you have said ; my mission 's ended."

As she spoke, she stood before him no longer a timid, shrinking child. She still wore the semblance of her former self, but there was an air almost of glory about her person, and a majesty in her clear eye, from which all earthly passion had fled, and her low startling tones spoke like those of conscience.

"Now hear and see the hidden past, and from that divine the future."

All about him seemed to whirl. The room, the furniture, the bed, whirled and whirled, and then became a mist. The mist gathered into masses which filled the room and pressed upon him. He shook with mortal fear, and closed his eyes, for he shrank from what was to come. Again the voice of Esther came stealing on his ear ; so quiet yet so commanding that he could not but listen.

"Now hear the past, as you know it not, and yet as you know it well. The flight of time rolls back upon itself, and as the curtain which

shrouds the past draws back, I see a feeble, sickly boy with his head bowed at his mother's knee, his hands clasped, and his lips uttering a lisping prayer; a very feeble prayer to reach so far; yet whispered as it was, it ascended to the Great Throne, borne upward by the strong fervid supplication of her who brought him into being, and now sheltered him beneath her strong love. I saw her borne to her grave, and the boy, as yet a child, left to the care of strangers, beneath whose neglect the lessons of his childhood were swept away. His nature became stern, and he grew up a cold and hardened man, strong to fight the great battle of life, and struggle for the rewards of earth, without one thought of her who had sheltered his young life, without one thought of the great reckoning to come. Again I see him in his youth, a plodding, striving man, with earnest brow and toil-hardened hands. He is sitting at a table with a book in his hand, thumbed and well worn. It marks the progress of his gains, and he pores and ponders over it, turning from it only to look at a small box near by which holds those gains, the story of which is written in the book. Upon a shelf near by, there

lies another book. It is dust covered, and has been undisturbed for months. A spider has woven his web around it, and rests there in security. It is a book of promises—of promises which never fail.”

Obed turned uneasily in his bed. “I know it well,” muttered he. “My mother’s Bible. She gave it when I was a boy, a very little boy.”

The girl did not seem to hear him. “Promises made when the earth was in its infancy and humanity was tainted first with sin. Promises which have ever been fulfilled, and ever been renewed, as man’s wants call them into birth, and whose glad realization shall exist when earth and man shall be swept away, and time itself merged in the great ocean of which it forms a drop—eternity.”

Obed raised his eyes; but he could not bear the earnest, mysterious gaze that met his own. He trembled at her words, and yet he could not but love and reverence her; for he felt their truth like Holy Writ.

“Speak, I charge you,” said he, with half-imploping, half-shrinking gesture. “Let me know the truth. Who are you?”

"Listen," answered the girl. "From childhood until now, there was one commissioned from on high to guard and direct the footsteps of that man, as he journeyed along the road which leads to the dark valley, and to point out the seed of good works which might be sowed on earth and yield a glorious harvest for the garnerers of eternity. But he would none of her counsel. He heeded not her whisperings. Seared in conscience and flint in heart, he turned away from the calls of heaven and fixed his eyes on earth."

"O my child! my child! do not rebuke me thus," said the wretched man, clasping his hands and bowing his head upon them. If I was hard to others, I was never so to thee. If I labored to become rich, it was that you might enjoy it. If I loved gold; if I perilled all to get it, it was because my love for you was greater than all else! Do not speak thus. I cannot bear it."

He bowed his head upon his clasped hands, and the tears trickled through his fingers.

"Your love to me was the last hope of heaven. The guardian spirit took her station at your side through life. In form, your child,

the object of your love and care ; but still your guardian—with the same solemn duties, with the same high trust committed to her, and with that holy love alone as the last link of the golden chain to lead you from earth to heaven. With mortal form came mortal frailties ; but far above all earthly cares was the high and holy purpose for which she came. Now tell me before I go (for earth is passed with me forever), was I recreant to my trust ? ”

The old man spoke not, for his heart was filled with its own communings. The memory of the past was sweeping through his mind ; wasted opportunities,—the great omissions,—time speeding on and pointing to age, decrepitude, and death. He dared not look up at his accuser. He dared not answer. At last the words, “ My child,” burst from his full heart, “ speak one word of pardon for the past.” There was no response. Once more he looked up. His daughter lay lifeless before him. With a wild cry he flung himself at her side.

“ Esther, dear child of my heart ! guardian spirit ! whoever thou art, come back ; oh ! leave me not forever ! ”

The lifeless form moved not ; and as he

struggled to raise her from the ground he saw standing at her side the semblance of herself, ethereal as a phantom, serenely beautiful, yet calm and passionless as ice. He stretched out his hand imploringly.

"If thou art she who has been life-long at my side, to keep me from sin, come back! By Him who died upon the cross, I implore it. By Him who heard the dying cry of one who led a life of crime and sought His mercy only in the throes of death, and pardoned; for His holy sake, pardon and return."

"Man!" replied the spirit, "I can never again be child of thine. While mortal means could lead you right, my errand was on earth. That time is past; the future is in the hand of Him whom we all obey."

"Yet hear me once again," said the wretched man, rising up and confronting the form, whose dim outline was shadowed still before him. "By your own value of man's salvation! as you would not abandon a human soul to perdition, and consign it to everlasting woe, I charge you desert me not in this my hour of utmost need and deepest agony, when all that is good within me is battling for life against the power

of evil. Daughter ! spirit, whatever you are ! you dare not thus desert me for whose redemption such a price was paid. There is a promise in the book which you, even you, oft read to me : ‘ That no call for mercy, however late, shall be unheeded ; that no sin, however dark, but can be washed away.’ You dare not thus desert your trust, and take your flight to Him who sent you, with your errand unfulfilled ; for my cry for mercy and pardon would follow you to His very feet and condemn you there.”

There was no response to his passionate appeal, and as he held out his hands imploringly, the dim form faded from his sight, all about him seemed to change, and the mist which had obscured his brain swept away. He was lying in his bed.

The sunlight was streaming through the window ; a bird was carolling on a tree near by, and his daughter was sitting at his bedside, holding his hand in hers. The old man clasped his arms about her, and held her fast.

“ My child, my own dear child ! I promise all. I ’ll do all you ask. I never knew till now how great a debt I owe, and how little of it I

have paid—the great debt which riches owe to poverty.”

He bowed his head upon her shoulder, his gray locks mingling with her bright tresses, and still he kept his hold. He whispered in her ear:

“Send back John Wakeman’s money. I’ll not take it.”

His daughter looked at him with a bewildered air, and passed her hand affectionately over his gray hair, but made no reply.

“Don’t tell me that it’s too late,” said he, passionately.

He looked at the table where John had left the money. There was nothing there.

“Where is it? I saw him count it out on that very table.”

Esther took his hand gently. “You’ve been dreaming, father. You had a fall from your horse, and have been dreaming ever since.”

Could that strange, sad scene be but a dream. If it were, he thanked God that it was so, and not a stern reality. Like the Israelite king of old, he turned his face to the wall, but in silence, and with that silence were mingled prayers; prayers which were no longer idle

words, but which throve and bore fruit; and when he arose from his bed of pain—for he lingered there some days,—his resolutions had taken shape, and settled in the one fixed purpose of spreading sunshine in his path and gladness in that of others. He felt that the dream was a revelation from on high, and that his daughter all unknowing was his guardian angel still.

The first thing he did was to visit Pepper; for he could not get the idea out of his head that his midnight ride was a stern reality. He examined him from head to heel, and thumped his ribs. There had always been a prodigious display of bone about Pepper, and it was all there still.

“That horse is a wonder,” muttered Obed. Pepper looked over his shoulder at him as if he agreed with him.

“We ’ll keep what we know to ourselves, won’t we, Pepper?”

He tried to do so, but it was useless. Two old negroes and a women had seen him on his mad race, and the adventure got wind. He denied it stoutly; but with his denial its circulation increased, until it obtained the full credit

which it merited, and it passed into a proverb, when one was dealing with a hard creditor: "May you ride on Obed Groot's hunt!"

From that eventful night he changed his ways. He sent for John Wakeman, and not only gave him time to pay his debt, but helped him forward in the world, so that in a few years he became a thriving, prosperous man.

As Obed indulged the feeling of benevolence and kindness to his fellow-man, it grew and throve, so that his heart, from being of the size of a dried currant, waxed large and generous in its impulses, and a poor neighbor, whom he had rescued from poverty and vice, swore that it was as large as a pumpkin.

From being shunned, his house became the seat of hospitality; the corners of his mouth lost the old habit of turning down, and his chin was safe. His daughter was with him still, with her calm counsels cheering him on, and with a husband to help her, and with several little guardian angels to tease and worry Obed, and climb his knee and pull his hair; but he gathered them in his arms, and declared that all the world could not produce their equals.

His only regret was that he had not discovered the grand secret of happiness until so late, and that so much time had been wasted ere life's true labor had been commenced.

HARRY BLAKE.

A Story of Circumstantial Evidence, founded on Fact.

CHAPTER I.

AT about the time when the ill-feeling between England and her American colonied had ripened into a rebellion, there stood on the road between Albany and Schenectady an old house whose walls had been reared by the sturdy hand of some Dutch builder. It was time-worn and gray, but every thing about it was solid and strong. The barns were roomy and extensive, with wide doors and windows, and had a comfortable, liberal air.

From the lowest branch of a large sycamore in front of this house, hung a sign-board ornamented with the figure of a horse of a deep-blue color—a variety of that animal common in those days, but at present extinct,—indicating that it was a place of public entertainment.

Such an intimation, however, was little needed ; for the Blue Horse was noted throughout the whole country round for its good ale, its warm fireside, and its jolly, jovial landlord, who told a story, drank his ale, and smoked his pipe, with any man in the country. Could he but get a crony at his bar-room fire, he cared little whether the fellow had an empty pocket or not, nor whether the ale which was making him mellow was ever paid for.

It is no wonder, then, that the Blue Horse became the delight of the men, and the horror of their wives, who wondered why their husbands would wander off, at night, to old Garret Quackenboss' house, and listen to his roystering stories, when they could be so much more usefully employed at home, in splitting wood or rocking the baby.

Rumors of their hostility reached the ears of old Garrett ; but he smoked his pipe, closed his eyes, and forgot them.

His customers did the same ; and in spite of conjugal opposition, the bar-room of the Blue Horse was rarely empty.

This bar-room was large, with a wide fireplace, and great sturdy fire-dogs, on which

were huge logs of wood. Heavy rafters, blackened by smoke, crossed the ceiling of the room.

Resting on hooks over the fire-place were several guns, covered with dust and cobwebs, They probably had never been used since the landlord was a boy; but he occasionally cast an anxious eye on them, as rumors of war and strife reached him from the more eastern colonies.

Wooden chairs, wooden tables, a wooden dresser, garnished with pewter plates, shining like so many mirrors, and a huge arm-chair in the chimney-corner, with Garret Quackenboss' fat body resting in it, completed the furniture of the room.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon of a bright day in autumn, and in this very room, and in the midst of a group of men, with the face of the landlord showing out like a red sun from among them, that we open our narrative.

The men were all of the same class as Garret—plain, sturdy, substantial,—either farmers, who had loitered in to pick up the gossip of the day; or those who, on their way from Albany or Schenectady, had dropped in to have a talk with old Garret before indulging in

that same pleasure with their better halves at home.

The subject, however, which now engrossed them was far from a pleasant one. It seemed so even to the landlord, for he was silent, and turned a deaf ear to what was said ; it being a fixed rule of his to interfere in no man's difficulties but his own. And as this, which was a hot dialogue between two of his guests, was evidently fast verging into a quarrel,—after eying the parties steadily for some time,—he thrust his hands into his pockets and left the room.

Before closing the door, he turned and looked solemnly at the disputants, to let them see that their misconduct was depriving them of the light of his countenance. Then shaking his head, and emitting from his throat a grumbling indication of discontent, he shut the door and went out.

“Come, come—stop this, Wickliffe,” said an old man, one of the party, on whom, at least, Garret's look had produced an effect. “Don't you see you've driven Garret away? This dispute is mere nonsense.”

The person whom he addressed was a short, square-built man, with a dark, sallow face, a

pair of dark black eyes, which at times kindled and glowed like fire, a low wrinkled forehead, and lips that twitched, baring and showing his teeth like a mastiff preparing to bite.

And as he sat there, with his fingers working with anger, and his lips writhing, he was about as ugly a looking fellow as one would wish to see.

He turned slowly to the old man who spoke, and snapping his fingers in his face, said: "*That* for old Garret! Let him go; and as for this dispute with that boy, it's my affair, not yours; so don't meddle with what don't concern you."

The old man drew back abashed. But the opponent of Wickliffe, a young fellow of three or four and twenty, whose frank, handsome countenance, and glad eye, seemed the warrant of an open, generous disposition, now spoke:

"Well, Wickliffe," said he, "if you will quarrel, I won't. I didn't want to drive Garret out of his own bar-room; and you know he never will stay where there's quarrelling. So drink your ale, and we'll say no more about this matter."

"But I *will* say more about it," retorted the man, half rising from his seat, and at the same time shaking his fist at him, "I *will* say more; and who 'll hinder me, I 'd like to know that? And as for you, Mr. Harry Blake, I will say, too, that in spite of your big carcass, you have no more spirit than a woman. That is what I 'll say."

"Well, well, say it, if you please," replied Blake, going to the fire and seating himself on a bench in front of it, "I 'm sure I don't care."

As he spoke, he laughed; and leaning forward, he picked up a chip which lay on the hearth, and commenced stirring the fire with it, at the same time whistling, and paying no attention to what his opponent said, other than by an occasional laugh at his evident anger at being thus foiled.

At last Wickliffe, turning to a man who sat next to him, muttered something between his teeth which drew the cry of "Shame! shame!" from those around him, and of which Blake caught but the words, "Mary Lincoln." But they brought him to his feet.

"What 's that you say about Mary Lincoln?" said he, advancing towards the man,

who was looking at him with a grin of satisfaction at having at last aroused him.

"Nothing, nothing," replied several, at the same time rising and placing themselves between him and Wickliffe. Don't mind him, Harry; don't mind him. He's in a passion, and does n't mean what he says."

"But I do mean it!" shouted Wickliffe. "I do mean it; and I repeat it. Mary Lincoln is——"

"What?" demanded Blake, quickly, his eyes glowing with anger.

Wickliffe eyed him for a moment with a fixed, dogged stare, and it might have been shame, or it might have been a feeling of trepidation at having at length aroused Blake, and at seeing him, with every muscle of his powerful frame strung, ready to leap upon him, that deterred him; for he turned away his head, and said: "No matter what. I've said it once, and that's enough. They all heard it."

Harry Blake's face, from a deep scarlet, became deadly pale, as he answered: "Wickliffe, I did not hear what you said; but I dare you to repeat it. If you do, and there is one word in it that should not be, this hour will be the

bitterest of your life. I 'm not the man to make a threat and not to act up to it."

He stood for a moment waiting for him to repeat his remark, and then turned on his heel and walked to the furthest end of the room; and as he did so it was remarked by several, who thought nothing of it at the time, but who remembered it long afterwards, when every word then uttered and every action done became important, that he ground his teeth together, and, seizing a large knife which lay on the table, with his teeth still set, drove it into the table, and left it sticking there.

Still his adversary did not seem disposed to give up a dispute which it was evident had already been carried too far; for he demanded in an impatient tone:

"What 's Mary Lincoln to you, my young fellow, that you bristle up so at the very mention of her name?"

"What is she to you?" continued he, becoming still more excited; "be she pure as snow—or—or—or what I will not name! One would think you were a sweetheart. A glorious pair you 'd make! Your red-hot temper would be finely balanced against her sweet

face and disposition. Sweet—very sweet ; and so yielding and dove-like that she cannot resist importunity, however improper. Ha ! ha ! It makes me laugh.”

His laugh, however, was a short one ; for the words were scarcely out of his mouth before Blake was upon him.

Exerting his great strength, now doubly increased by fury, he fairly swung the speaker from his feet, and flung him across the room and against the opposite wall, striking which he fell at full length upon the floor.

For a moment Wickliffe lay stunned ; but recovering himself, he sprang up, and, shaking his fist at Blake, and saying, “My boy, you may take the measure of your coffin after this ; for you ’ll need one,” darted from the room. A speedy opportunity might have been afforded to him to put his threat into execution, had not several persons sprang forward and seized Blake, as he was following, and held him back by main force.

“Don’t stop me !” exclaimed he, struggling to get loose, and dragging the strong men who held him across the floor.

“Let loose your hold, Dick Wells ; let loose

your grip," exclaimed he to one who held him by the shoulders with a strength nearly equal to his own, "or I'll strike you."

"No, you won't, Harry," replied the other. "But even if you do, I'll not let you go on a fool's errand. So there's no use scuffling in that way."

Blake saw that nothing was to be gained in a struggle with so many, and so he said, "Loose your hold. I'll promise not to follow him. But mark me," said he, as they relinquished their hold, "you have this night heard this scoundrel defame one of the purest girls that ever lived, because he had a grudge against me, and knew that she was to be my wife. He shall pay for it, if it cost me my life."

"Come, come, Harry, don't be a boy," said the old man who had before interfered with Wickliffe. "The man was half drunk and quarrelsome, and saw that you could n't stomach what he was saying, and so he said it. No one cares for him, or his words. We all know that Mary Lincoln has n't her equal in these parts. God bless her! I only wish she was my own child. Not but what my poor little Kate is a good girl; and kind and affectionate,

too, poor little Kate is; but yet, she is not Mary Lincoln; but Kate is a good girl, though; a very good girl." And the old man shook his head reproachfully, as if there were a small voice whispering at his heart, that he should not have placed his own poor little Kate next after Mary Lincoln.

Harry Blake's face brightened, as he looked at the old man; and he took his hand and shook it warmly.

"You're right, Adams—you're right. Mary needs no one to speak up for her. I see it. God bless you for all your kind feelings towards her. And now that I think of it, Adams, tell Kate that Mary may not be Mary Lincoln long, and may soon want her to stand up with her."

"I will do that, Harry," said the old farmer, rubbing his hands together, "and right glad I am to hear it; but, Harry, you'll not carry this quarrel further—promise me—I can trust you, I know."

Blake, however, laughed and shook his head. "I'll think of it," said he. "'Beware of rash promises,' was what I learnt from my copy-book. But now I must go. Five miles are

between me and my home." As he spoke, he turned from them and left the room, and in a short time was heard galloping down the road.

He had not been gone many minutes, when one of the company, an old man, dressed in a suit of gray homespun, who had been sitting by the fire a silent spectator of the altercation, got up, and turning to a man who was leaning carelessly against the opposite side of the fireplace, said: "Come, Walton, let's follow Harry's example. Our paths are the same, and we'll go in company; and as you are the youngest, you can get the horses."

The person thus addressed seemed to agree to the proposal, for after yawning and stretching himself, he went out, and in a few minutes was heard calling from without, that the horses were ready.

The road which they pursued was the one already taken by Wickliffe and Blake; and as they had far to go, and it was late, they struck into a brisk trot, so as to pass a dreary portion of it, which ran through waste and forest, before the night set in.

Part of it was solitary enough, shrouded by tall trees, covered with long weeping moss,

trailing from their branches to the earth, and resembling locks blanched by age. And in other parts, dense and tangled bushes, with giant dead trees stretching out their leafless branches over them, crowded up to the very road.

They were trotting briskly between two green walls of swamp and forest, when suddenly a sharp, shrill cry rose in the air. It seemed to proceed from the woods a short distance in front of them.

They were both bold men; but their cheeks grew white, and they instinctively drew in their horses.

"Was that a shout or a scream?" asked Grayson, turning his heavy whip in his hand, so as to have its loaded handle ready for a blow.

"It smacked of both," replied Walton.

"Hark! there it is again."

Again the same piercing cry rang through the air, echoing through the woods until it seemed to die away in a low wail.

"There's foul play there," shouted Walton. And giving his horse a sharp cut of the whip, the animal sprang forward at a gallop.

"There it is, again. Hark! It is some one begging for mercy."

"Stop, Walton," said Grayson, reining in his horse. "Did you hear the name?"

"No."

"I did, and it was Harry. Can Harry Blake be settling scores with that braggart Wickliffe?"

"God of Heaven! I hope not," exclaimed Walton. "There was bad blood enough between them to lead to a dozen murders. Go it, Jack," said he, again striking his horse, "we'll be upon them at the next turn of the road. The bushes hide them now."

A dozen leaps of their horses brought them round the copse of trees, which had shut out a sight which now made them shudder.

Within twenty yards of them, extended on his back, lay Wickliffe, dead. Bending over him was Blake, grasping a knife, which was driven up to the haft in his breast.

"Good God! Harry Blake taken red-handed in a murder!" exclaimed Grayson, seeing Blake endeavoring to pull the knife from the wound. "Don't stab him again. Oh! Harry, Harry, what have you done?"

Blake started up as they advanced. He looked hastily about him; made one or two irresolute steps; but before he could make up

his mind what to say or do, Walton sprang from his horse, and flung himself upon him.

"Harry Blake, I charge you with murder."

Blake stared at him. "Me! with murder? Are you mad? Why, I did n't kill him."

"It won't do, Harry; It won't do," said Walton, bitterly. "I saw you with the knife in your grasp—in his bosom—and him dead. Oh, Harry! This is a sad ending of this afternoon's quarrel."

"Will you hear me?" said Blake, earnestly, "and you Caleb—you are older than Walton, and less impetuous, listen to me. I came here but a moment before yourself. I heard a person calling for help, and galloping up, found Wickliffe dead, with this knife driven in his heart, and was endeavoring to pull it out when you came up. This is truth, so help me God! Don't you believe me, Caleb."

Grayson shook his head, as he replied: "Would that I could, Harry, but as I hope to be saved, I saw you stab him—I did."

Harry clasped his hands together, as he asked: "And do you intend to swear to that—and to charge me with this deed?"

"There is no help for it, as I see," said Gray-

son. "The man is murdered. If you did n't murder him, who did? Answer me that."

As he spoke he proceeded to examine the body to see if it retained any signs of life; but it was motionless, with its open eyes staring at the sky, and the teeth set hard, as if the spirit had gone in agony. The knife had been driven so truly that it must have passed directly through the heart; and the blood which had gushed from the wound, had already saturated the murdered man's clothes, through and through, and formed a small pool in the road.

"Harry Blake," said the old man as he drew the knife from the wound, "this is a fearful deed, and the punishment is equally dreadful. You know that I am a magistrate and must discharge my duty."

"And will you send me to prison on such a charge as this?" asked Blake, bitterly.

The old man was silent.

"Did you ever know me to lie, Caleb?" said he.

"Never, Harry, never!"

"And do you think I lie now?"

"I don't know," replied Grayson. "I never before saw you when there was so great a risk

hanging over you. Oh! Harry, Harry!" continued he, clasping his hands together and looking at the young man, with an expression in which terror and sorrow were strongly blended, "I would rather have met any man here than you. It will make many a sad heart in this neighborhood. Why did you not promise what Adams asked? or, rather, why did you leave us then?"

Blake shook his head as he answered: "Caleb, what can I say more than I have said? If I repeat what I have just told you, you will not believe me. I was coming along this road, heard the screams of this man, galloped to this spot, and found him dead with a knife in his breast. I got off my horse to see what could be done for him, and was drawing out the knife when you came up. Had you been two minutes sooner, or I one minute later, I should have made the same charge against you which you now make against me."

"But the cry—the words: 'Mercy, mercy, Harry!' He uttered your name."

"He did, indeed," replied Blake; "he did, indeed! I heard it myself. But he did not say Harry Blake. Harry, you know, is not an unusual name."

"It may be; it may be," said Grayson; "but still we must deliver you up, and if you are innocent, God grant that you may prove yourself so; but unless my eyes deceived me, I saw you stab that man."

"If that is your belief, God help me!" said Blake, solemnly; "for you must be a witness against me. If I am charged with murder, such a fact sworn to would hang me. But you have not even looked for another murderer. He may be hid somewhere about here. Search in the bushes, and you may find him yet. I'll not stir."

With a strange reliance on the word of the man whom they would not believe when he asserted his innocence, they left him and commenced to search along the road. And there stood the culprit motionless, making no attempt at escape, and watching them with an earnestness only accounted for by the fact that on their success his life depended. At a short distance from the spot, and in a part of the bank on the roadside, where Blake said that he had not been, there was a footprint. It was indistinct; but (so far as could be judged) when compared with Blake's foot they coin-

cided in form and size. A little further on was another, and also the marks of a struggle in the road. Here, too, the footprints corresponded with the foot of Blake.

"It 's singularly like mine," said Blake, placing his foot on the track.

"It had ought to be," said Walton, gravely ;
"unless your foot has altered its shape within the last five minutes."

Blake made no reply to this insinuation ; but stood looking with an expression of deep trouble at the footprint. In the meantime the others continued their search up and down the road and in the bushes. The marks of the struggle were numerous ; but there was no trace of a murderer, other than Harry Blake. At last they both came out and stood in the road.

"Do you find nothing?" inquired Blake, earnestly.

Grayson shook his head as he said :

"I did n't expect to ; but you wished me to look, Harry, and I had a hard duty to perform, so I thought I 'd humor you. I knew that it would be useless."

"Well, well," said Blake, "every thing goes

sadly against me. You must do your duty. I am your prisoner."

"But," said he, seeing them moving to where the horses were, "what do you intend to do with that?" And he pointed to the dead body.

"Catch me a-touching it," said Walton. "Caleb chose to pull the knife out of him; but I would n't ha' done it. It's the coroner's business, that is. We'll send him here. Come, Harry. It is n't our fault; but you must go with us, you know."

Blake, without further remark, mounted his horse, and waiting until they were also on theirs, they rode off in company, taking the direction to the residence of the nearest magistrate, where, in due form, Harry Blake was delivered over to the mercy of the law, and arrangements were made for the removal of the body of Wickliffe.

CHAPTER II.

About five miles from the tavern mentioned in the last chapter, stood a spacious brick house, one story high, with low eaves, extending within reach of the ground, and tall pointed win-

dows perched along its roof. Creeping vines clambered about the windows and in fissures of the walls, forming a green mat over them, and stealing up the trunks of the trees which grew around the house. A sequestered lane led to the highway. Altogether it was a rural, snug old place; and in it was one of the snuggest of rooms, fitted up with little nick-nacks, rare in those days, with snowy window and bed curtains, and a bed as white and snowy as the curtains, fit only to be occupied, as it was, by the most beautiful little fairy of a girl that one's eyes had ever rested on—and that was Mary Lincoln.

At about eight o'clock on the morning of the day succeeding that in which occurred the incidents narrated in the last chapter, and in the small room just mentioned, sat a girl with glossy golden hair, engaged in sewing; though it must be confessed that her eyes were more often wandering through the window, and along that deep vista-like lane, down which her window looked, than fixed upon her work. It was the hour at which Harry Blake usually contrived, on some pretext or other, to find his way to the house, to see how she was, and to

ask a few questions, and to make a few remarks, the nature of which was best known to herself. On that day, however, he was behind his time. Still she felt quite sure that he would come.

He had said nothing about it; but she expected him as much as if he had, and was endeavoring to select one out of half-a-dozen slightly coquettish ways of receiving him. At first she thought that she would keep him waiting, a very little time, just enough to make him more glad to see her; but then, she would be as much a sufferer as he, for, impatient as he might be below stairs, she would be equally so above; so she abandoned that. Then she thought of taking her sewing down into the hall, and of seating herself on one of the old settees which garnished its sides, and that she would be busily at work and, of course, would not see him until he came up and spoke to her; or, perhaps, she might accidentally go out just as he was coming in. That, too, she abandoned; and then she fancied that she would stroll out and meet him in the lane; and it must be confessed that she inclined more towards this plan than either of the others, for she had happened to meet him in this way before, and on these occasions

Harry always tied his horse to a tree, and walked with her to the house, and although the distance was short they always took a great deal of time in walking it, and he had an opportunity of saying much, which not unfrequently he was unable to say at the house ; for her father was almost as fond of Harry as his daughter was, and had so much to tell him about his crops, and about this thing and that, and so much to ask him, that he sometimes infringed upon time which Mary thought belonged to her; and although she endeavored to bear it cheerfully, yet, at times, she could not help thinking how snug and comfortable and happy the old gentleman would be if he were only snoring away in the easy arm-chair which stood in the chimney-corner, although it was but eight o'clock in the morning.

She threw aside her work, and was rising for the purpose of adopting this last plan, when she heard the dashing of hoofs in the lane. "It's too late," thought she, "but I'll keep him waiting," and down she sat out of sight of the window, so that she could not be seen by the new-comer, for she did not wish Harry to know that she had been watching for him.

The noise of the hoofs increased ; and the horseman dashed at full gallop to the door.

This was not like Harry. He generally came fast enough along the road, but he did not gallop to the door like a madman. It was not respectful, and she would tell him so ; still, he might be in a hurry. It argued a strong desire to see her, and that was some palliation. There was evidently a stir below, in front of the house, and she even heard his name mentioned. What could be going on there ? She was dying to know. There was no way of learning, unless she went to the window, so as to look over the projecting eaves of the house ; and then she could be seen.

No, no ; she would not do that. Still the stir increased, and she caught the sound of voices in earnest conversation ; but Harry's voice was not among them. She could hold out no longer.

She drew a chair near to the window, and stood on it, but the envious eaves projected so as to shut out all view of what was going on below.

It was too bad !—but see she must. She then went up to the window. But nothing could

be seen there, for the speakers were close to the house, and not the smallest tip-end of the coat skirt of one of them was visible.

Poor Mary! She stood on tiptoe, and even on the chair; but still those unlucky eaves thrust themselves between her and the object of her wishes. She went back to her chair and sat herself down, wondering why they built such ungainly eaves and cornices, which were fit only to annoy people, and wondering why no one came to tell her that Harry was there and wanted her.

He was uncommonly patient that day—provokingly so. Five, ten, fifteen minutes elapsed. There was something like a tear in her eye; for she certainly was very ill used.

She threw her work from her, and determined to go down to him, and to make him pay up for his backwardness. Opening the door, she went to the head of the stairs, and assuming as careless an air as if there were no Harry Blake in the world, was going down, when the voice of her father arrested her.

“Don’t come down here, Mary,” said he.

There was something in the tone, and in his manner, and even in this injunction, that caused

her to stop, as if she did not understand him.

“Go to your room, my child; we are very busy here.”

Mary turned to go, for she saw that he was much agitated; but as she did so, the name of Harry escaped her lips.

“He is not here,” said her father.

“Has any thing happened to him?” asked she, in a faint voice.

“Yes, yes,” replied the old man. “He ’s in trouble; but he is well. Go to your room, and I will be with you in a few moments.”

She got to her room, she scarcely knew how, and threw herself on her bed, drowned in tears. “He ’s well—thank God for that,” sobbed she. “I ’m sure I ’m very grateful that he ’s not ill—very grateful; poor Harry—in trouble, too, and I, like a good-for-nothing minx as I was, have been thinking all the morning of nothing but teasing him. He was too good for me. They all told me so—so patient, so kind, so good-humored—and I—I’ll never forgive myself—I never will—never!” She buried her face in her pillow, and sobbed there, until the door opened and she felt her father’s arm around her.

He raised her, folded her tenderly to his breast, and placed her in a chair.

"Courage, Mary, courage, my little girl," said he, in a tone which certainly was not a model of what he recommended. "Show yourself to be a woman."

"Yes, yes, father, I will, I will," said she, and by way of verifying her words she threw her arms about his neck and wept more bitterly than before.

"Come, come, my dear little girl," said he, in a tremulous voice, "sit down and hear what I have to tell you."

As he spoke, he again placed her in the chair, and took her hand.

"If you are not able to listen to me now, I will defer what I have to say to another time," said he.

He probably could not have hit upon a better method of calling her to herself, for she had no small spice of curiosity in her nature, and just then remembered that she knew nothing definite of the evil which threatened Harry Blake.

"I can hear it now, father," said she, eagerly, "Tell me at once what has happened to him, and where he is."

"He has been arrested, and is in prison," said the old man, watching her pale face, as she sat with her eyes fastened on his, and the tears still on her cheeks.

"Is that all?" said she, in a half whisper. "Tell me all—why is he there?"

"He has been arrested on a very serious charge, said the old man, very slowly, and by his manner endeavoring to prepare her for the communication he had to make.

"Will it affect his life?" demanded she, at once catching at the heaviest punishment of the law. "Will it affect his life? Tell me that."

"If it is proved, it *will*," replied the old man.

"What is it? what is it?" said the girl, rising and grasping his arm. "Father, tell me, I charge you, and on your word tell me truly."

Her father put his arms around her, and strained her to his bosom, and looked in her face without speaking, until she repeated her question. Then he said in a scarcely audible voice, "He stands accused of murder."

"Murder!" ejaculated she, faintly, whilst her hands fell to her side. "Charged with murder! Why, Harry Blake would not harm a worm."

She extricated herself from him, made something like a step, and had not her father caught her, would have fallen. She had fainted.

The old man hugged her to his breast again and again, kissed her lips and cheeks, and called her by name.

"I knew it would kill her! I said it would kill her! My own dear, darling little girl! Mary, Mary, speak to your old father! She's dead! She's dead!"

Fortunately, the noise made by Mr. Lincoln reached some of the females of the house, who better understood the mode of administering to her illness. But it was not until he saw her eyes open, and a faint color once more in her cheek, that Mr. Lincoln could be induced to leave the room.

When she recovered, Mary was wilful, for once in her life.

In spite of all that they could say, she insisted that her father should have the horses harnessed to the wagon, and should drive her to the prison where Harry was. They argued and entreated. They spoke of her ill-health, of the danger to herself; but it was idle. She said that they were all against Harry; that he

was innocent ; that he had declared himself so ; that she believed him, and that go she would, if she went on her bare feet, that he might see that she at least was true to him.

At last they yielded, and she took her seat at her father's side. How unlike the light-hearted girl of but a few hours before. During the whole drive she spoke not a word, but appeared so calm, and comparatively so cheerful, that her father kept equally silent, until they stopped in front of the building in which the prisoner was confined.

As she entered his room, and caught sight of him, she sprang forward, and clasping her arms about his neck, wept like a child ; and he, throwing his arms about her and clasping her to his breast, kissed her cheeks and lips in a strange passion of joy and grief.

" I am come, Harry, I am come," said she, at last. " I have not deserted you."

" Dearest Mary, you at least believe me to be innocent ?" said he, in a low, earnest voice, holding her off from him, so that he could look in her face, but without relaxing his hold on her waist.

" Yes, yes, I do, I do ! I never doubted it for

a moment. But, oh! Harry, this is very dreadful—very dreadful! What will become of your poor little Mary, if any harm should befall you? But we won't talk of that," said she, quickly, for she observed that the words sent a sort of spasmodic shivering over him. "We won't talk of it, nor think of it. I'll come to see you every day, Harry, and will spend all the time that I can with you, and we'll be quite merry and cheerful here; and I can fix up your room, and do many little things to make every thing neat and comfortable, and I'll tell you the news, and will read and sing to you—Harry," said she placing her hands on his shoulders, and looking up in his face, "I'll sing the song you asked for yesterday, when I was vexed and refused. I'll sing it for you now, dear Harry—I will—I'll never refuse it again. Shall I sing it, Harry? Shall I, dear Harry?" A painful, sickly smile flickered across her face; a single feeble word, the first of the song, like the faint warbling of a dying bird, escaped her lips, and she sank senseless on his breast.

"Take her away! take her away!" exclaimed Blake, frantically, holding her out in his arms

towards her father; "unless you would drive me mad, take her away!"

The old man seemed stupefied, but he mechanically reached out his arms toward her, but Blake again caught her to his breast, and kissed her neck, face, hands, and even the long tresses that fell across his face, and then reaching to her father, said: "There, go, go; don't stop another instant."

Mr. Lincoln took her frail form in his arms, and moved to the door.

"One word, Mr. Lincoln," said Blake, "one word before we part. Whatever the result of this accusation may be, even though it end in my death—I am innocent. The time will come when I shall be proved so; and oh! I beseech, if I lose my life, that you will protect my memory with Mary."

The next instant he was alone; and throwing himself upon a chair, he sat with his face buried in his hands, until aroused by the entrance of the lawyer who had been retained by his friends, and who now came to consult with him as to the steps requisite for the management of his defence.

CHAPTER III.

When Harry Blake was first imprisoned he bore up stoutly against his fate. But stone walls and close, pent-up chambers, with their stifling, stagnant air, and their murky twilight, are glorious inventions for mildewing the heart, and breaking down strength and hope; and they soon began to tell upon him.

It might have been the loss of his accustomed exercise in the open air, or the want of the sight of the blue sky, and of his old home, or a dread of the fate which might become his, or (and there were many who believed this) it might have been the workings of his own evil conscience, that were making such wild work with him.

But certain it is, that although, when he was first confined, he seemed right glad as the day approached in which he would have the chance of meeting the charges against him in open court; yet, as the time drew near, his spirits drooped, and it was observed that the more often he conversed with his lawyer, the more gloomy he became, and that the very mention of the trial drove the blood from his cheek.

It was observed, too, that after these inter-

views he walked moodily up and down the room, with his arms folded, muttering to himself, as those do who have heavy burdens on their hearts, and that his face was pale and wasted, and his look troubled.

At other times he remained for hours with his arms crossed on the table and his forehead resting upon them, in such deep thought that he did not move when persons came in.

There were many among his friends who attributed his changed appearance to his confinement, and mental anxiety as to the result of his trial, and still persisted in their belief of his innocence.

But then there were those who thought otherwise, and fancied that remorse was doing its work, and that as the day of retribution approached, Harry's bold heart, which had hitherto borne him up, was failing him.

They said: "It was an evil omen to see him sinking thus, and giving up as if he were already a doomed man. They did not like it—it seemed a harbinger of a darker fate."

Neither hope nor dread can hasten or protract the steady march of time, and the day of trial arrived at last.

It was in the autumn, when skies were cloudless, and the fields and trees were clad in rainbow liveries. It was an idle time, too, in the country, and from far and near the inhabitants of town and hamlet gathered to see the sight. A man with his life at stake, and struggling and battling for it with so mighty and shrewd an adversary as the law.

It was indeed a great sight. It was worth going miles to witness. Nor was it the less exciting that they knew the victim, and that many of them had hitherto admired his noble and upright character, and loved the man. But he had shed blood, and must pay the forfeit.

The court-house was a large stone building, standing by itself in the midst of a green lawn, and at some distance from any other house. But its solitude was now broken by the hum of voices, for from every quarter people were pouring in, old and young. Females, and even children were there.

Some were speaking on indifferent subjects: of the difficulties with England, of the state of the crops, and one old man, broken down and tottering, of his fields, of what he intended to

plant in them on the following year, of young trees which he had set out, and of the pleasure he anticipated in sitting under their shade when they should become great and tall and overshadow his house. "They are saplings now, but they will grow fast, and in a few years will be quite shady"; and the old fellow laughed and shook his head, and rubbed his hands as he thought of it.

In three weeks, the earth was on his coffin; and when those trees were grown, they had passed into the possession of strangers, and the hands that planted them were dust.

Some were talking of the murder; and of Wickliffe; and of what a pest he had been to the country round, so quarrelsome; and what a pity it was that a fine fellow like Harry Blake should have to die for having killed a man like him.

They then spoke of Mary Lincoln; and one of them lowered his voice, and said that he heard that this was killing her. He had seen the doctor, who had been at Mr. Lincoln's twice a day since Harry Blake's imprisonment, and he had said he was afraid that it would go hard with her; she was very ill. Then the conver-

sation was interrupted by the arrival of more new-comers. In another part of the lawn, an old man was leaning on a cane, addressing a crony, who seemed as old and time-worn as himself.

"Ah! neighbor Williams," said he, "this is a very sad business—a very sad business. I knew his father before him, and I have known Harry since he was a mere baby,—who 'd 'a thought it of him? —who 'd 'a thought it?"

Neighbor Williams shook his head, as much as to say that nobody would have thought it; but seemed to think further expression of his opinion unnecessary, for he said nothing.

"He was a warm-hearted little boy, and a very likely man,—a very likely man," continued the first speaker. "It grieves me to see him here. It does indeed, neighbor Williams."

Again neighbor Williams shook his head; probably to intimate that it grieved him too, but as before he remained silent.

It is a matter of some uncertainty how long neighbor Williams might have been thus entertained by his companion, had not their conversation been interrupted by a general buzz of "Here he comes!" The next moment Harry Blake

walked through the crowd, with an officer on each side of him. He was exceedingly pale, but his face was full of calm determination, and his step firm and strong. He looked neither to the right nor to the left; and apparently without noticing a soul entered the court-house.

The crowd followed closely after him, and the next instant were striving and struggling and fighting to obtain a good position in the court-room.

Harry Blake seemed quite collected, and the crowd felt somewhat disappointed that a man who had committed a murder should look like other men. Some whispered that he must be a hardened reprobate, not to show some remorse, and others said that none but an innocent man could appear so calm and composed. There was a great deal of whispering and talking among them, whilst the jury were getting empanelled, but when the counsel for the prosecution rose to open his cause, they were so silent that they seemed not even to breathe.

He dwelt briefly but clearly on the facts which are already known. He stated that he should prove, that, on the day of the murder, the prisoner and Wickliffe had been together at a

tavern not far from Schenectady ; that a quarrel had arisen between them and blows had passed ; that the prisoner had knocked Wickliffe to the floor ; that Wickliffe had fled, and that the prisoner had been detained from following him only by force, and had then called all those present to witness that he would be revenged on that man for the wrong done him, if it cost him his life ; that he had finally been released by those who held him, on promising not to follow Wickliffe, but that he had positively refused to promise that the quarrel should stop there.

That shortly afterwards he left the house alone, taking the same road which Wickliffe had already taken ; that two of the persons who had been at the tavern with him soon afterwards left the inn, and took the same road. That on arriving at a very lonely part of it, they were alarmed by the cries of a person in distress, and uttering the words : " Mercy, mercy, Harry ! " that these persons galloped to the spot from which the sound seemed to proceed, and found a man kneeling at the side of another just murdered, and grasping in his hand a knife which was driven to the haft in the breast of the victim ;

that the murdered man was Hiram Wickliffe, the person with whom the prisoner had just quarrelled, and on whom he had sworn to be avenged, and that the person kneeling at his side was Harry Blake, the prisoner. There were footprints near the road, where there had evidently been a struggle, and these footprints had been examined and compared with the foot of the prisoner, and were found to coincide in size.

He stated his case concisely, yet clearly, and seemed to think the facts sufficiently strong to require but little exertion of eloquence or ingenuity on his part. It is needless to linger on the detail of the testimony confirming the case, which the lawyer had stated in opening. It was clearly proved, although every effort was made, by a severe and strict cross-examination, to embarrass and confuse the witnesses.

It had been observed, when Walton and Grayson were called, that the prisoner became exceedingly pale, and when Grayson swore that he saw him stab Wickliffe, he compressed his lips, as if a sudden pain had shot through him, and clenched his fingers together, and

bent his head down ; nor did he look up until Grayson had left the stand.

The old man was terribly agitated, and his testimony was drawn from him by piecemeal. He tottered as he left the stand, and as he passed where Blake sat he muttered in a low tone :

“I could n’t help it, Harry—indeed I could n’t, for it was the truth.”

Blake looked painfully at him, but made no reply.

He had little or no defence to make. He could not contradict the facts. An effort was made by his lawyer to prove his general good character, his amiable disposition, and the little probability of his being guilty of a crime like this.

The lawyer felt a strong inclination to admit the murder, and to attribute it to a blow struck in the heat of anger in a renewal of the quarrel which had been interrupted at the tavern ; but Blake had positively forbidden a defence of that nature, declaring that it was false, and that if his counsel attempted to assert what was untrue, he would contradict him in open court.

After a long and labored and hopeless speech, the lawyer sat down.

The reply of the counsel for the prosecution, which followed, and the charge of the judge, were both conclusive against him, and without leaving their seats the jury returned a verdict of "guilty" of murder in the first degree.

CHAPTER IV.

When Mary Lincoln came to herself, she would have gone back to Harry Blake's cell ; but her father was afraid that it would prove too much for her strength ; and he persuaded her to defer it until the morrow, promising that if she were then well he would accompany her. She made but feeble objection, for she felt heavy-hearted and almost reckless. Her father led her down the steps, and placed her in his wagon, and they drove off. It was a gay, sunshiny day ; and parts of the road which they had to pass were thickly settled, and there were people scattered along it and in the fields. The news of the murder, and of Harry Blake's arrest, had already got wind, and as they passed, those who knew them, stopped to look

at them, and shook their heads, and said, "that this day would be a sad one to some of old George Lincoln's folks; that it was a pity so heavy a blow should fall on one so young as she was—she was a mere child—God bless her!"

Mary Lincoln sat quietly by her father's side, not noticing those whom they met, nor speaking until she reached her home.

Her father lifted her out of the wagon, and accompanying her up stairs, told her to be of good heart, and left her to herself. What a chaos of bewildering thoughts was in that young girl's brain as she threw herself upon her bed! how busy that little head was! how it teemed with hopes and fears and plans and schemes to aid Blake! how confident she was of his innocence, and that he would be acquitted, without a shadow upon his name! Hour after hour passed while she lay there. Once or twice the door opened, and her father, or one of the females of the family looked in, and seeing her so quiet, supposed that she slept, and closing the door gently, went out.

Sleep came at last, but it was troubled and broken; and when morning dawned, she found

a woman watching at her bedside, and learned that she was in a high fever. Still she made light of it, and got up; and although she felt sharp pains shooting through her limbs, and her head swimming, she contrived to dress herself and to go down stairs.

In vain the nurse remonstrated. She replied that she had promised to go to Harry Blake that day, and that she would keep her promise; but when she reached the hall, she tottered so, that she was compelled to abandon her intention—for the prison was a long way off,—and to admit that her strength was gone.

Well, if she could not see him, she could write; and going to her own room, she locked the door, and wrote a long letter.

It was a very cheerful one, full of hope and gay anticipations, and of plans and projects to be carried into effect when he should be once more free. And she had so much to show him, and so much for him to do then. She begged him to keep up his spirits, for he was sure to be acquitted.

She felt very sanguine of that; and excepting that she could not see him every day, she felt no uneasiness as to the result, and was

happy—quite happy. She folded the letter, sealed and directed it, and with her own hand gave it to the person who was waiting for it. She bade him, in a cheerful tone, and with a bright smile, give it to Harry himself—to say that she was well—quite well, and in good spirits; that she had been unable to go to the prison that morning, but would come to him to-morrow. She waved her hand gayly to the man as he galloped off.

Who would have thought that the poor little heart which was keeping up so bravely was breaking, and that in a minute from that time, she was locked in her own room, with her face buried in her hands, shedding the bitterest tears that she had ever wept. What sad and dreary thoughts came over her then! Fears, like shadows which she could not define or grasp, seemed flitting around her, hemming her in on every side, until she felt that there was no hope left; and that he and she were parted for ever. Oh! how forlorn and helpless she would be, if he were gone! How lonely the world would be, to live on, day after day, week after week, and months and years, and never see him again, nor hear his voice;

and to know that he was in his grave ; that as long as she lived, though hundreds might be about her, and love her, and do all that they could to make her happy, still, that he would never be among them again ! No, no ! it could not be—it could not be ! She felt that it would kill her.

The day passed heavily, and as night was closing in, an answer came from Blake ; but it came to one whom it could not comfort, for Mary Lincoln was delirious.

Several weeks passed, and still she balanced between life and death ; but one morning the physician came down stairs from her, with a smile on his face. He said that his patient was decidedly better ; she had little fever and was rational ; only keep her quiet and she would do well.

It was a morning of great excitement to Mr. Lincoln, however, for it was that of Blake's trial. He had concealed this from his daughter, and had endeavored to encourage her hopes, but there was something in his subdued manner and attempts at cheerfulness, when he spoke of herself and Harry, and put aside the curtain of her bed, and pressed his lips to her

sunken forehead, and whispered to her to keep up her spirits and that all would be well, that made her feel more dispirited than ever.

It was late in the afternoon. George Lincoln was sitting in the hall, when he heard a horseman galloping in hot haste up the lane. He had not dared to leave his daughter that day; but a friend who attended the trial had promised to send him immediate word of the verdict, so that, whatever it was, he might divulge it carefully to his daughter. He started up, and hurried to the door. As he did so, the horseman dashed into the yard, and at the top of his voice bawled out:

“They ’ve found Harry Blake guilty of murder.”

The old man shook his hand at him, and made signs for him to be quiet; and fearful that his words might have reached his daughter, without waiting to hear the particulars, hurried up to her room; and there he saw what made him through life a sadder man than he had ever been before; for, stretched on the floor, directly under the window, to which she had evidently been attracted by the arrival of the horseman, his daughter lay.

A thin stream of blood was trickling from her mouth, and her eyes were closed. He caught her in his arms—a faint struggling breath escaped her lips. He thought, too, that she murmured the name of Harry Blake; but it might have been fancy, for her breath ceased, and when the loud cries of her father had brought to his assistance other members of the household, there was nothing to be done but to lay on the bed the lifeless body of her who had been the pride of that old man's heart!

CHAPTER V.

On the night preceding the execution, half a dozen men were assembled in the bar-room of the Blue Horse, most of whom had been there at the time of Blake's quarrel with Wickliffe. A dull and melancholy group they were. It might have been the absence of the jolly face and merry voice of old Garret Quackenboss, who was gone to Albany to lay in a stock of substantials to keep up the well-known gastronomic character of the Blue Horse; or it might have been the great size of the bar-room, with its murky corners, whose darkness was

scarcely relieved by the dim light which flickered up from a dying fire, aided only by the sickly flame of a single candle; or it might have been the approaching end of one who had so lately been among them, that had this chilling effect on their spirits.

But certain it is, that rarely had the bar-room of the Blue Horse contained so dull a party.

They had gradually drawn close to the fire; and as the night had closed in, and the wind wailed about the old house, their conversation had assumed a sombre character, and they whispered in each other's ears strange stories of robberies, murders, midnight assassinations, and even of ghosts. And on this subject one of them was positive to having had a private ghost in his own family for years—an aunt in the fourth degree, by the mother's side, who haunted a hen-house on his father's place, and, what was remarkable, after her last visitation ten eggs and the old gamecock, the patriarch of the barnyard, were missing, showing that ghosts were partial to eggs, and not particular as to the age of poultry. Another of them mentioned in a confidential way, to the whole company, that his grand-

father had walked a mile in a dark wood on a stormy night in company with a ghost, which behaved in a very civil and gentlemanlike manner ; so much so, that the old gentleman, up to the day of his death, asserted that ghosts were a very ill-used class of beings, and that for his part he wished that many people who pretended to be their betters, were only as good as they were. From this topic the conversation gradually wandered off to Harry Blake, and his trial and his approaching death.

“Don’t you think they might pardon him?” inquired Caleb Grayson, who was one of the party, and who had been sitting among them, without taking any part or showing any interest in their conversation, until it touched upon the subject of Blake’s execution ; but then he seemed keenly alive to it, and with his features working with intense anxiety, he repeated his question :

“Don’t you think they might?” I wish they would. Do tell me, some one. What do you think?”

“I heard that Mary Lincoln’s father did his best for him ; but it was of no use,” replied one of those addressed. “But you must not grieve

about it so. You could n't help being a witness against him. Even Harry said so himself."

The old man's face brightened, and something like a smile passed over it, as he said: "Did Harry say so? Well, I'm glad of that; for it makes me very sad when I think that it was I and Walton who put him where he is; indeed it does."

"It was no fault of yours," said the man, "and you must n't let it trouble you. I'm sure I should have done as you did."

"Ah! here comes some one."

The last words were called forth by the sound of a horse clattering up to the house, and the loud voice of a man bawling out for some one to take his horse; and in a few minutes a tall man, unknown to them all, entered the room, with a short whip in his hand. There was little in his features, or in the appearance of his person, to encourage familiarity; for his complexion was swarthy and sallow, and his expression any thing but prepossessing, and his dress was coarse and soiled, as if from hard travel.

He paused a moment, and looked about him;

and then striding across the room, drew a chair directly in front of the fire, in the midst of the astonished group, and held his feet to the blaze.

"A threatening night, friends," said he at length, addressing them.

There was something in his stern, sinister eye and haggard, repulsive face which gave a momentary check to the conversation. No one answered him, and he went on.

"Go on, don't let me stop talk. On with you. I want to break in on no man's humor. I've an odd humor of my own; for I've heard that there's a man to be hanged to-morrow, and I've come fifty miles to see it. I was at the trial, and now I've come to see if he'll wear the same bold face when he dies that he did then."

"So you were at the trial?" said Caleb Grayson, who was leaning with his elbow on the table, and his cheek resting on the palm of his hand, and looking gloomily into the fire.

"Ay, I was, my man," said the stranger, bluntly, "and I saw you there. You were the witness who swore that you saw him stab Wickliffe. I was at your elbow at the time. Your testimony *did* for him."

The old man half started from his seat, and turned exceedingly pale, at the same time pressing his hand across his eyes. At last he said, in a low, agitated voice :

“What could a man do? I was forced to go, and my answer was on oath. I did see him stab him—I ’m sure I did.”

“Then, of course, it was all right,” replied the other. “For my part, I ’m glad he ’s to hang. I shall be glad when he ’s out of the way. Had I been on the jury, and known only what you stated, I would have brought in the same verdict.”

The old man looked at him sharply, as he asked : “What do you mean? What else do you know?”

“Know!” repeated the stranger, looking carelessly up, and drumming with his whip upon his boot. “Nothing. What could I know? You saw him murder the man, did n’t you? You swore to that. I should think there was little more to be discovered.”

“True, true,” replied the other. “Yet this is a strange story of Harry’s, and even now he persists in it, and in asserting his innocence. Poor fellow! I always loved that boy as my

own child—I—I who have brought him to this end.”

“ Poor little Mary Lincoln too ! it has killed her. Thank God ! she ’s in her grave. It ’s better for her.”

“ Of course, he ’ll insist to the last that he is not guilty,” said the stranger. “ There ’s always two ways of dying. Some confess, and throw themselves on the mercy of the law. Others keep their mouths tight, and accuse it of injustice to the last. The first hope for pardon through its clemency. The last hope it, through the fear which every man has of shedding innocent blood. He ’s one of the last. He bears it boldly, I ’m told.”

“ Harry Blake is no coward,” replied Grayson. “ He says he is ready to die, but that he is innocent. The love of life must be strong in him, for until now I never thought that he would lie, even to save his life. But he is not innocent—no—no—he is not ; for I saw him strike the blow. The love of life is very strong. It must be, or Harry Blake would not lie.”

A slight, sneering smile flitted across the face of the stranger, as he turned from the speaker and looked among the dull embers of the

fire, in silence. It was a dim, dreary room, and its distant corners were lost in darkness; and the form of the stranger, as he sat between the andirons, threw a gigantic, spectral shadow on the wall that seemed to have something ominous about it, and, taken in connection with the gloomy nature of the conversation, and the cold indifference of the stranger, and his wild, forbidding air, seemed to have thrown a chill on all about him. For as he sat there, buried in deep thought, with his eyebrows knit, and his lips working as with suppressed emotion, those who had hitherto hugged the fire began slowly to widen the distance between themselves and their ill-omened visitor; to scan his person, as if there were more in it than met the eye, and to watch his tall shadow on the wall, as if there were something about it more than appertained to shadows in general. Still they spoke not, until the object of their solicitude, as if concluding a long mental discussion, drew a heavy breath, and rising, said: "Well, let him die. It's as well. Others have died in the same way."

Turning to a sort of under-barkeeper, who officiated in the absence of Garret, he said:

"See to my horse, will you? And now show me to my room; and call me at sunrise; I shall not breakfast here."

Those collected about the fire watched him as he followed the attendant out of the room and shut the door after them.

"What do you think of that man, Mr. Tompkins?" said one of them to a small man in an ample vest and contracted smallclothes.

"Come, come, none of that," said the small man, with an air of suspicious stubbornness. "Don't be trying to make me commit myself by asking questions." As he spoke he fixed his eyes obstinately on his own finger-nails, not that they were particularly clean or ornamental.

"Can't you speak your mind, man?" said the other, pettishly.

Still the small man ogled his nails.

"Well, then," said his companion, "I'll tell you what I think. I think," said he, sinking his voice, and placing the back of his hand to the corner of his mouth, by way of indicating the extreme of confidence, "I think he won't be *drowned*."

"Ah!" said the small man, "if that's all, I think so myself."

And having settled this matter to their mutual satisfaction they rose to go, a motion in which they were followed by all except Caleb Grayson, who, long after they were gone, and the room was silent and deserted, sat there, with a heavy heart, at the part which the law had forced upon him, and which had led to the execution which was to take place on the morrow. At last he started up, and finding his way to the stable, saddled his horse and rode off.

It was a dark night. Black clouds were drifting across the sky, obscuring it, and together with the tall trees and forests, which in places overhung the road, rendered it pitchy dark.

In defiance of the threatening look of the sky and the obscurity of the road, the old man kept steadily on for several hours, neither pausing to rest his beast nor to refresh himself until it was broad daylight, when he arrived at a large wooden building. Stopping for the first time, he fastened his horse to the gate, and crossing a small yard, ascended a flight of steps and entered the hall.

A guard was pacing up and down there ; and

near him on a wooden bench sat an old man reading a worn-out Bible.

"Can I see Blake?" demanded Grayson of the old man.

"Yes, I suppose you can," replied he, putting aside his book; "I've orders to admit his friends—a sad business—a sad business—and he the flower of the country round."

"Ah, neighbor Grayson, who would have thought it?"

Caleb Grayson made no reply to the remarks in which the old man indulged, until he opened the door of the room or cell, and pointed to Blake, seated at a small wooden table within.

Blake rose as the old man entered, and extended his hand to him.

"This is kind, Caleb," said he; "I was afraid that you alone of all my friends would not call to see me, for I know what you think of me."

"Ah! that's the reason, Harry, that I could not come," replied the other, sadly. "I knew that I had brought you to this, and I could not bear to come and look at my work."

"Well, well, it's all past, and God knows I've little to live for now—poor Mary—she's gone—no matter, no matter; the worst is over

—and you must n't lay it to heart, Caleb—you acted for the best, and we 'll not talk of it.”

“But we must talk of it, we must!” exclaimed the old man.

“In spite of all that I felt, it 's what I came for. If I would die easy I must know the truth; and I have come here, Harry, to beg, to conjure you to tell it.”

“You have heard it already,” said Blake, sadly.

“No, no, Harry, I have not; I know I have not,” said he, “but you will tell it to me now.”

Harry Blake turned his head away and was silent.

“Harry, my dear boy,” said the old man, crouching at his feet, and pressing his forehead against his knees, “my own dear boy, do confess to me. It will render more happy a life that is nearly spent, to have my statement confirmed by your own lips. Don't be afraid of me, Harry; for here, I swear, in the presence of the God who made us both, that I will not reveal what you tell me. Indeed, I will not. Come, Harry, come.”

“Caleb,” said Blake, passing his hand kindly over the old man's head, “from my soul I pity you; but I cannot lie.”

"*You pity me !*" said the old man, rising. "Am I the one to be pitied? No, no, not quite so bad as that—not quite so bad as that. I'll not believe it, say what you will. With my own eyes, Harry, I saw you commit that murder—indeed I did!"

Blake shook his head. "You think so—I know you think so; I'll do you that justice. But your eyes deceived you. It's useless to dwell on this now. You have done what the law made your duty, in telling what you believed to be the truth. I should have had to do the same myself, and I freely forgive you."

"No, no, Harry," said Grayson, with childish querulousness, "this will not do. Why will you not tell the truth? You cannot be saved now. All hope is passed. Come, there's a good fellow. You met—you quarrelled—words grew high—he attacked you—and, finally, you—you—stabbed him. Ha! ha! that was the way of it; was n't it? A man will do many things when his blood's up which he would n't at another time. Your hot blood could n't bear all that he said. It was natural, and, I think, pardonable—indeed I do."

He placed his hands on Blake's shoulders,

and, looked imploringly in his face, whilst his voice changed from one of assumed vivacity to one of the deepest sadness. "Harry, was n't it so? Tell me, my own dear boy, was n't it so? You know you quarrelled with him at the tavern."

"I did, indeed," said Harry, gloomily; "God forgive me for it."

"And you swore that you would have revenge if it cost you your life?"

"It was an impious speech," replied Blake, in a grave tone, "and fearfully has it been visited upon me."

"You left the tavern," continued Grayson, eagerly, "took the same road which he had taken, came up with him——"

"And found him dead," said Blake.

"I'll not believe it! It's not true!" exclaimed the old man, striding up and down the room, with his hands clasped together. "It's not true. Oh! Harry, it's horrible to go to the grave persisting in a lie."

"Hark!" said Blake, as the voices of persons approaching the door were heard. "It's the hour, and they are coming for me! Good-by."

One word, Harry ! ” exclaimed Grayson ;
“ are you guilty ? ”

“ No ! ” replied Blake, with an earnest emphasis.

The next moment the door was opened, and Blake was summoned to go forth.

CHAPTER VI.

By daybreak all the country round was astir. Men singly and in squads of three and four ; women and children old and young ; the hale, the sick, the decrepit, were all in motion, and drifting like a sluggish current towards the place of execution.

It was in a large field, in a retired, out-of-the-way spot, hemmed in by trees ; a spot whose silence and solitude were rarely disturbed ; yet now it hummed with life.

Fences, rocks, and every little eminence of ground were packed with people. The trees were crowded with human beings, who hung like bees from their branches, and near the foot of the gallows the earth was black with them, crammed and wedged together—not an inch to spare. There was a great sea of faces,

turned up at one time to the tall framework above them ; at another, towards where the far-distant road wound among the hills. Occasionally there was a scuffle, and the mass rocked to and fro, like a forest waving before the wind, and then came curses and execrations from the writhing multitude ; but by degrees the tumult subsided, and they were quiet again. Then they looked at the sun, and wondered how soon Harry would come—they were weary of waiting. Some spoke of him as of an old friend. He was a fine fellow ; they had known him from childhood. “Has he confessed yet ?” inquired one.

“No, no, not he,” was the reply. “He ’ll not give up till the last ; it ’s thought he ’ll do so then. I heard some one say that old Caleb Grayson was all last night in his cell, trying to pump it out of him ; but he was game. Caleb could get nothing from him.”

“Come ! I like that,” said the other, rubbing his hands together. “That ’s so like Harry. I ’ll bet ten to one he ’ll not show the white feather at last.”

“Ha ! who ’s that ?”

As he spoke he pointed to a tall, swarthy

man, who was forcing his way through the crowd, jostling them hither and thither, heeding not the grumblings and cursings which followed him as he dragged himself on. Once or twice, as some fellow more sturdy than the rest withstood him, he turned and glanced at him with a look of such savage and bitter anger that the man was glad to let him pass. Thus he went on, until he reached the very foot of the gallows; and there he fixed himself, taking notice of no one, and regardless that even in that dense crowd a small circle was formed around him, as if there were contamination in his touch. Above him, from the cross-piece of the gallows, the cord swung to and fro in the wind, and at times, as he raised his eyes to it, a smile crossed his face, giving to it a strangely wild expression that was long remembered by those who saw him there.

“There ’ll soon be something to tighten that string,” said he to a tall, burly man who stood nearest to him with his good-natured eye running from the speaker to the cord, as if it struck him that the weight most fitting for that purpose were nearer than he imagined.

"Yes, there will be, more 's the pity," said the man in reply to the remark, after pausing for some time, as if in doubt whether it merited one. "I for one am sorry for it."

"Would you have the murderer escape?" demanded the stranger.

"Let him hang when he 's found, say I," replied the man. "Harry Blake denies that he did it, and I believe him."

Again that strange smile passed across the stranger's face, as he said: "Twelve sworn men, all of whom knew and liked Blake, heard the testimony and said he did it. What more would you want?"

"I want Harry Blake's own confession, and we would have it if he were guilty. That 's what I want. I wish to heaven I had found him with the murdered man, I would have known the truth. I went to the spot the next day, but it was too late."

"What do you mean?" inquired the stranger with some interest.

The man moved a little aside and showed the head of a large dog, who was seated near him, with his nose thrust forward, almost touching the stranger. "I went with that dog

to the spot, and I put his nose to the track. He went round and round, and over the ground for more than a quarter of a mile. In the woods he found an old hat, which he tore to rags. I believe it belonged to the true murderer (he was smelling that hat this very morning, for I took it with me), but he lost the scent. Then I carried him to Harry Blake, but he would not touch him."

"A strange dog."

"Damme, sir!" said the man, earnestly. "Do you know that he's been snuffing about you for the last ten minutes. Curse me if I have n't my suspicions of you."

The stranger's eyes fairly glowed as he returned his look, and then he burst into a loud laugh and turned to those around :

"Hear him ! He says I murdered Wickliffe, because his dog smells at my knee. Ha ! ha ! ha ! Why don't you arrest me ?" demanded he, turning to the man.

The man, evidently abashed at this abrupt question, shook his head, muttered something between his teeth, and remained silent, and the stranger, after eying him for several moments, seeing that he was not disposed for further con-

versation, and apparently not caring to be the object of attention to all eyes, as he then was, moved off and stationed himself on the opposite side of the gallows.

The time lagged heavily. The crowd grew restless and uneasy, and here and there, one or two, irritated beyond their patience, commenced a quarrel which came to blows. This created a temporary excitement, but it was soon over, and by degrees they grew wearied again. They stamped their feet on the ground to keep them warm. The farmers talked of their harvest and of their stock. Some of them gaped and yawned, and fell sound asleep as they stood there. Young girls flirted with and ogled their sweethearts, and there was many a pretty face in that crowd, whose owner had been induced to come only for the sake of him who was to escort her there, and who was thinking more of the young fellow who stood at her side, in his best apparel, than of Harry Blake.

These and the troops of liberated schoolboys, to whom a holiday was a great thing, even though bought by the life of a fellow-being, were the only persons unwearied.

But the time came at last, and a loud cry

arose in the distance, and swept along through that multitude, becoming louder and louder, until it reached the foot of the gallows; and the whole mass swayed backward and forward, and rushed and crowded together, as in the distance the prisoner was seen approaching. With a slow, steady pace the soldiers who guarded him came on, forcing open the throng, and keeping an open space around the cart which conveyed him. Harry Blake was exceedingly pale, but his manner was composed, and his eye calm and bright as in his best days, and many a lip as he passed muttered a "God bless him."

He spoke to no one; although his face once or twice faintly lighted up with a look of recognition as he saw a familiar face.

When he reached the foot of the scaffold, his eye for a moment rested on Caleb Grayson, looking imploringly towards him. The old man caught his glance, and exclaimed as he ascended the steps:

"Now, Harry, now confess; do, Harry—for God's sake!"

Blake shook his head.

"No, Caleb, for I am innocent."

These were his last words ; for in a few minutes the drop fell, and poor Blake's earthly career was ended.

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed the same swarthy man, who had stood during the whole time at the foot of the gallows, and whom Grayson recognized as the person whom he had met at the inn the night previous. "That business is over. *That's law!*"

And, without noticing the startled looks of those about him, with the same recklessness which he had displayed in coming, he forced his way through the crowd and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

About three months after the execution of Blake, the judge who presided at the trial received a note from a prisoner under sentence of death, requesting to see him without delay, as his sentence was to be carried into effect on the day following. On his way thither the judge overtook an old man, walking slowly along the road, whom he recognized to be Caleb Grayson.

The old man had received a note similar to

his own ; and was going to the same place, though he was equally at a loss to know the meaning of the summons. They both entered the cell together.

The prisoner was seated at a wooden table, with a small lamp in front of him, his forehead leaning on his hand, which shaded his eyes from the light. He was a tall, gaunt man, with dark, sunken eyes, and unshorn beard and hollow cheeks.

He looked like one worn down by suffering and disease ; yet one whom neither disease nor suffering could conquer, and to whom remorse was unknown. He did not move when his visitors entered, otherwise than to raise his head. As he did so, Grayson recognized at a glance the stranger whom he had seen at the tavern the night before Blake's execution, and at the gallows.

"Well, Judge," said he, as soon as he saw who they were, "I sent for you, to see if you can't get me out of this scrape. Must I hang to-morrow?"

The judge shook his head. "It's idle to hope," said he ; "nothing can prevent your execution."

"An application might be made to the higher authorities," said the prisoner. "Pardons have come, you know, even on the scaffold."

"None will come in your case," replied the magistrate.

"It is needless for me to dwell on your offence now, but it was one that had no palliation, and you may rest assured that whatever may have occurred in other cases, no pardon will come in yours. In fact, I understand that an application has been made for one by your counsel, and has been refused."

The features of the prisoner underwent no change, nor did the expression of his face alter in the least. But after a moment's pause he said: "Is this true, Judge—upon your honor?"

"It is," replied the judge.

"Then I know the worst," replied the criminal, coldly, "and will now tell what I have to communicate, which I would not have done while there was a hope of escape."

"You," said he, turning to the judge, "presided at the trial of young Harry Blake, who was accused of murder, and sentenced to death."

"I did."

"And you," said he, turning to Grayson, "were one of the witnesses against him. You swore that you saw him stab Wickliffe. On your testimony, principally, he was hung."

"I was," replied the old man. "I saw him with my own eyes."

The prisoner uttered a low, sneering laugh as he said, turning to the judge:

"You, sir, sentenced an innocent man."

"And you," said he, turning to the other, "swore to a falsehood. Harry Blake did not kill Wickliffe. He was as innocent of the sin of murder as you were—more innocent than you are now."

The old man staggered as if he had been struck, and leaned against the table to support himself, whilst the condemned felon stood opposite him, looking at him with a cold, indifferent air.

"Yes, old man," said he, sternly, "you have blood and perjury on your soul, for I—I—" said he, stepping forward, so that the light of the lamp fell strongly upon his savage features—"I murdered Wickliffe! I did it! Thank God! I did it; for I had a long score to settle with him. But Blake had no hand in it. I met

Wickliffe on that afternoon alone, with none to interfere between us. I told him of the injuries which he had done to me, and I told him that the time was come for redress. He endeavored to escape; but I followed him up. I grappled with him, and stabbed him. As I did so I heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and I leaped into a clump of bushes which grew at the roadside. At that moment Blake came up, and found Wickliffe lying dead in the road. You know the rest. The tale he told was as true as the Gospel. He was only attempting to draw the knife from the man's breast when you came up and charged him with the murder!"

"Good God! can this be possible?" ejaculated the old man. It cannot be, villian! you are a liar!"

"Pshaw!" muttered the man. "What could I gain by a lie? To-morrow I die."

"I don't believe it! I don't believe it!" exclaimed Grayson, pacing the cell, and wringing his hands. "God in mercy grant that it may be false! that this dreadful sin may not be upon me!"

The prisoner sat down, and looked at the

judge and the witness with a calmness which had something almost fiendish in it, when contrasted with the extreme agitation of the one, and the mental agony of the other.

At last the old man stopped in front of him, and with a calmness so suddenly assumed in the midst of his paroxysm of remorse, that it even overawed the criminal, said :

“ You are one whose life has been a tissue of falsehood and crime. You must prove what you have said, or I ’ll not believe it.”

“ Be it so,” replied the prisoner. “ I saw the whole transaction, and heard all your testimony at the trial, for I was there too. I ’ll now tell you what occurred at the spot of the murder, which you did not mention, but which I saw. When you rode up, the other man jumped off his horse and seized Blake by the collar ; your hat fell off on the pommel of your saddle, but you caught it before it reached the ground. You then sprang off your horse, and whilst Walton held Blake you examined the body. You attempted to pull the knife from his breast, but it was covered with blood, and slipped from your fingers. You rubbed your hand on the ground, and going to a bush

on the roadside broke off some leaves and wiped your hands upon them, and afterwards the handle of the knife. You then drew it out and washed it in a small puddle of water at the foot of a sumach bush. As you did so, you looked round at Blake, who was standing with his arms folded, and who said : ‘ Don’t be uneasy about me, Caleb, I did n’t kill Wickliffe, and don’t intend to escape.’ At one time you were within six feet of where I was. It ’s lucky you did not find me, for I was ready at that moment to send you to keep company with Wickliffe ; but I saw all, even when you stumbled and dropped your gloves as you mounted your horse.”

“ God have mercy on me ! ” ejaculated Grayson. “ This is all true ! But one word more. I heard Wickliffe, as we rode up, shriek out ‘ Mercy, mercy, Harry ! ’ ”

“ He was begging for his life—my first name is Harry.”

The old man clasped his hands across his face, and fell senseless on the floor.

It is needless to go into the details of the prisoner’s confession, which was so full and clear that it left no doubt on the mind of the

judge that the prisoner was guilty of Wickliffe's murder, and that Harry Blake was another of those who had gone to swell the list of victims to Circumstantial Evidence.

JOHN MUNRO.

CHAPTER I.

UPON a promontory, jutting out into a noble bay, stood, in times gone by, a grand old house, vast and imposing from its size, and venerable from its age.

It had been built two hundred years, and was full of odd nooks and corners, long corridors, dark, dim chambers, and halls wide and regal in their size.

Large trees flung their branches over it. They had been saplings when its corner-stone was laid ; but they were giants now, and stretched out their branches as if to shelter it ; for time and storm were writing their story on its walls. Moss was growing on the roof, and swinging doors and unglazed windows showed that neglect had aided in the work of ruin.

In its best days it had teemed with guests, and echoed to the sounds of gayety ; for it had

belonged to a free-hearted race, noted for the open-handed hospitality of its men, and the peerless beauty of its women. But the wealth which had supported it had taken wings and fled, and the heavy heart and anxious brow had usurped the place of gayety and song.

Those who had loved the place for the halo which old memories flung round it, had sunk into the grave, or were themselves forgotten in their dark hour;—and the house had passed into the hands of strangers.

Neglect followed the change of owners. It was too costly to be kept up. Its shrubbery ran wild. Vines and creeping plants clambered over its walls, and its walks were grass-grown. Strange stories, too, got afloat about it. It was said that steps went echoing through the house at night. Sometimes strong and heavy, like the tread of an armed man—at others, so light that fairy feet seemed to be gliding over the old floors, as if the spirits of those who once graced the dim chambers still lingered there.

Its evil name completed what neglect had done. It was deserted by its last tenant, an aged negro who had lived there rent free, and it was considered unlucky to cross the threshold.

It had remained thus for several years, until one day, a person wandering near it observed smoke ascending from a chimney.

On the following day, a grave, stern man stopped at the village near by, to purchase a few articles; and directed them to be sent to Colonel Grafton, at "The House."

For a time speculation was busy regarding the stranger. Grafton was known to be the family name of the old owners of the place. But why he had come back, and from whence, were matters of surmise. It was evident that his means were limited, for his purchases were few, and of little price, and it was shrewdly suggested that he would not have taken up his quarters in such a dwelling if he could have gone anywhere else.

Little could be learned about him, except that he was a man well stricken in years, apparently feeble in health, and was accompanied by his daughter, who was both young and beautiful, and that her name was *Edith*. They were attended by the man who had appeared at the village. He was about sixty years of age, with grave, stern features, iron-gray hair, a steady, uncompromising eye, and a frame broad, massive, and apparently cast in iron.

It was difficult to define the relationship which existed between Colonel Grafton and this man; for, although he usually treated the Colonel with the deference due to a superior, yet at times he assumed a tone and authority altogether incompatible with the idea of menial service.

There never was any thing approaching to disrespect in his manners; but in his whole deportment there was an air of grave responsibility, as if he felt that the charge, both of his master and his daughter, devolved upon himself.

His erect military carriage, and the undress uniform which he sometimes wore, showed that he had been in the army, and a scar across one eyebrow seemed to indicate that in that service he had not escaped unscathed.

Their coming was a nine days' wonder, and then curiosity respecting them gradually died out, and they came to be regarded by their neighbors as part of themselves.

It had become known, from remarks which escaped their attendant, that he and Colonel Grafton had served in the army together; that the latter had been his superior officer, and

that when, with broken health and shattered fortunes, he had sought the home of his forefathers, the dragoon, for such he was, had followed him, sometimes acting as an attendant, more frequently as adviser, but never at any time in their intercourse forgetting the distinction of rank which had existed between them in former days.

Shortly after their arrival, a female domestic was added to their family, and immediately buried herself in the recesses of the kitchen, from which she seldom emerged.

The old man and his daughter rarely left the grounds about the house ; and whatever they required was purchased by their attendant.

Colonel Grafton was a reserved and silent man to all except his old comrade in arms ; but no sooner had the bustle and excitement of settling themselves in their new abode worn off, than a spirit of morbid restlessness came over him. He wandered through the house and grounds, at times pacing the stone-paved courtyard for hours, muttering to himself, and won from his gloomy musings only when the bright face of his daughter looked up in his, or her silvery tones broke in upon his reveries.

Sometimes he would rise at midnight, and, with a dim light, would wander through the rooms, stopping to gaze at the faded portraits on the walls, examining the dusty and worm-eaten furniture, or pausing to listen to the wind sighing through the passages.

One night, when thus engaged, he was startled by a heavy step behind him. He had heard of the iron tread which sometimes tramped through the house at night, and with a kind of anxious expectation he turned to meet his half-dreaded visitant.

With a feeling of disappointment, his eye rested on the ponderous figure of the dragoon.

"Master Richard, the night is the time which God has made for man's repose. Why will you contravene his laws, and wander here when you should be sleeping?"

"John," replied the other, in a half-jesting half-earnest tone, "I 'm told that in this house the dead walk, and that in the hour of midnight their ghosts still people these chambers."

"Well, let them," replied the dragoon. "We 've nothing to do with them. We 're flesh and blood, and have nothing in common with them. There 's room enough in this house

for them and us too. They do not trouble you, Master Richard, I hope?"

"The ghosts which haunt me are memories of the past—of blighted hopes and ruined prospects. These dog my footsteps wherever I go. In my bedchamber, in my walks, at my table, in my sleep and dreams—they are ever with me, giving me no rest nor peace. John, I sometimes fear they will drive me mad!"

The dragoon made no reply, but taking the light from his master's hand, said in the same tone in which he would have addressed an ailing child: "The night air is chilly, and lingering here will do you harm. These rooms are very damp and cold."

"Aye," replied the other, "they are damp and cold now, but in times past they were not so. Think of what they have been—think of the founders of this race, and of what they were—and of me, their descendant, and what I am."

"Do not fret about these things," replied the dragoon. "It's a waste of time. Come, Master Richard, it's gloomy here, and it's wrong to linger. The cold will strike to your very heart."

The other did not heed him.

"I tell you, John, that I can hardly bear this," said he, his frame trembling as he spoke, and the words coming from his lips with tremulous energy. "At no time, and in no place, is my mind so busy as here. Here, every devil in my brain is at work, dragging the past from the dim recesses of memory ; I cannot forget it, if I would. It leaps back into the present. These mouldering walls, this furniture decaying with mildew and rot, the sagging ceilings, the gaping windows, and the dust-begrimed floors,—all replete with desolation and decay, disappear. About me, is this house in all its glory. The halls are crowded ; the rooms are flashing with light, with youth and beauty ; and instead of the sighing of the wind I hear the music of happy voices, and the gay laugh and the light step of those who are without care. When I lie down to sleep—sleep brings dreams like these ; and I wake more lonely than ever. And when I look upon my child, pure and innocent as when she first came from the hand of God, fitted to shine with the brightest that ever lived here, I demand for what fault of mine or hers are we, the last descendants of our race, cast upon the world, impoverished and wretched !"

The dragoon made no reply, but with a quiet authority, warranted by years of friendship, drew his master's arm in his and led him from the room.

He did not leave him until he had conducted him to his own chamber. As he turned to go he said :

“Colonel Richard, in the hour of battle you trusted in God. Do so now.”

He left the room and closed the door, but for more than an hour he kept watch there, nor did he leave the spot until the unbroken quiet told him that the troubled occupant within was at rest.

More than a year had passed since they had come there ; and Colonel Grafton by degrees became reconciled to his fate. He still kept aloof from his neighbors ; but where there is a damsel, young and beautiful as Edith was, young men will find it out, and will admire, and sometimes fall in love.

But her heart as yet was with her father, and although she was no stranger to the covert glances which were cast at her as she passed through the village on her way to church ; and although she caught many a furtive look dur-

ing the prosy sermon, still she gave encouragement to none. When the service was over, she tucked her little hand in her father's arm, and tripped gayly at his side, without paying heed to the havoc which her trim figure and dark dreamy eyes were making in the hearts about her.

John Munro always accompanied them, following in the rear, erect and soldier-like, keeping a watchful eye on his convoy, and upon the prowlers who hung about it, fingering, as he went, the head of a stout cudgel in a manner that was by no means encouraging to Edith's many admirers.

It was strange, he often thought, that one who could head a column in battle, as Colonel Grafton had, could be such a child in the ways of the world.

One afternoon a stranger came to the house and asked for a night's lodging. He was young and gayly dressed, but John Munro did not like his looks, and told him that the town was not far off, that the road to it was plain, and that he could find good quarters there, and be beholden to no man.

The stranger thanked him, but still lingered,

and asked a number of questions about the house and the family. He got but curt answers from the dragoon, who kept the door half closed, and permitted nothing to be seen beyond it but his own grim visage.

The stranger was not to be beaten off. He continued to loiter, the dragoon still mounting guard, until, as ill luck would have it, the old man came up the path with his daughter on his arm.

With something like a curse, the soldier strode out and pulled the door shut after him; and as he saw the stranger advancing towards his master, he stepped before him and forestalled his words.

"This gentleman," said he "is seeking quarters for the night. I've told him that there is an inn in the town near-by. I'll conduct him to it," added he, by way of making matters more easy.

Colonel Grafton looked at the young man and bowed. A slight tinge of color came across his cheek as he said :

"You seem to be a stranger here."

"I am, and yet I am not. I was seeking quarters it is true; but I hoped to find them at

the house of Colonel Grafton, the former companion-in-arms of my father, Thomas Rivers."

"Aye, and you shall find them," said the old man, the hospitable spirit of his race breaking out. "There 's not much to offer, but such as it is you shall have it."

And thus the stranger formed the acquaintance of Richard Grafton, and became his guest.

Whether his coming was as accidental as he represented it to be, or whether he had heard of the daughter of his host, and came with designs upon her heart, or whether he came, led thither only by the desire to know one of whom his father and the world spoke well, it matters little.

When the morning came, he found an excuse to remain until late in the day. He had much to tell of interest to those about him. He, too, was in the service—a captain in the army. His regiment, he said, was stationed in the Far West, and he had a short furlough. He had also many stories of the past to tell, and was able to recall to the memory of his host scenes and incidents in his early life, as they had been narrated to him by his father, dwelling upon them with the enthusiasm of youth, and so

turning the old man's thoughts from the present to the past, that he seemed to grow young again.

The eye of his daughter brightened as she watched the happy change.

Night was coming on, and he was urged to delay his departure until the morrow. He was nothing loth ; and the following day found him there still ; and not that day alone, but a week passed, and still he lingered. In truth so attached had the old man become to him, that he seemed unhappy when he was even from his side.

The dragoon watched him with a suspicious eye. Had there been no other tenant of the house than his master, he would have rejoiced at heart, to see him shaking off the lethargy, which had weighed him down for months. But he also observed that while the guest was talking with the father, his eyes were conveying a tale of a different sort to the daughter ; and the drooping eye and blushing cheek of the girl, and the furtive glance, causing her to reddened to the very temples when detected—all told the old story as well as words could have done.

The dragoon fairly gnashed his teeth, as he looked on, and felt how powerless he was. From the bottom of his soul he distrusted the man; for there was something in his dark glowing eye, fascinating as that of a serpent, that made him feel that he was false at heart.

He endeavored to caution the father against the too great intimacy which was springing up between the young man and his daughter—but he would hear nothing against his new friend.

While this was going on at the house a stranger arrived at the village. No one knew him. Nor did he say from whence he came. It leaked out, however, that he was a friend of Captain Rivers, and had come at his request.

Why Rivers had sent for him he did not say; and no one knew.

Several times he and Rivers were seen together in an out-of-the-way place; but he never came to the house, except once, when Colonel Grafton and the dragoon were absent on business.

Then he called, and spent some time there with Edith and Rivers.

He departed before Colonel Grafton returned, and on the following day he left the village.

All that John could do was to watch and wait. On one pretext or another Rivers continued to linger on for several weeks, and, in spite of all the efforts of the dragoon, the intimacy between his mistress and their guest grew more close.

At last, Rivers announced to them that his furlough had expired, and that he must leave on the following morning.

John was present when he announced his intention. He did not hear the words of regret which his master uttered, for he was watching the drooping form of his little mistress.

All that evening she moved about with a listless, frightened air, keeping close to her father's side, and shrinking from their visitor, with an expression almost of aversion. She never looked at him, and when he approached her, drew away, and when she retired for the night she placed her arms about her father's neck, and asked his blessing.

John Monroe watched her as she went upstairs, and muttered an inward thanksgiving that on the morrow the author of her troubles would be far away.

That night she fled. When the morning

came they found her room unoccupied, and a letter on the floor, addressed to John Munro. It ran thus :

“DEAR JOHN :

“Comfort my father in his hour of need. A great calamity has fallen upon me, and I must go where there are none who ever knew me.”

It was not signed.

John Munro could not believe it. He sought her through the house, and through the garden, and through every nook and corner of the grounds.

He read the letter again and again, but it seemed to bring no conviction to his mind, and he resumed his search. But it was idle, and the reality of her flight at last settled down upon them. Her father sank beneath the blow, and when he had recovered from the half unconscious state into which her loss had thrown him, his words were few.

“John, when I lamented the loss of wealth, I little dreamed how much was left to lose. Help me to bed.”

The dragoon raised him in his arms and bore him to his room. He never left it, but lingered on a few weeks, watching anxiously as each

step approached, and then turning his face drearily to the wall as it passed.

He died at last. His parting words were: "John, you will remain here, and have a home for her when she returns—as she will be sure to do."

As he spoke, his head fell back upon the breast of the dragoon who was supporting him, and he was dead.

A week had passed; the remains of the colonel had been committed to the earth, and John Munro had returned to the deserted house. He seldom left it now, but seemed forever on the watch. He had been a silent man, but now he never spoke unless when addressed, and his mind seemed ever busy with one sad and overwhelming thought.

"John, you will remain here and have a home for her when she returns—as she will be sure to do."

He was sitting near the fire, where he always sat, as he repeated these words. The room wore a cheerful look, for he strove to keep it as it was when she had occupied it. But that night he was strangely restless; he paced the floor, then seated himself and endeavored to read, but memories of the past were busy in his brain;

his book was unheeded ; the light grew dim ; the fire flashed and flickered, and fantastic shadows danced upon the walls.

He was roused from his reveries by a tap at the window-pane. He looked up. He knew full well the face that was looking in—pale and haggard though it was. He hastened to the door, drew back the bolt, and without a word opened wide his sheltering arms, and taking the drooping figure, which was crouching there, to his breast, bore her in and placed her in a chair in front of the fire.

Kneeling down, he took her hand in his and carried it to his lips, as respectfully as if its owner wore a diadem, for her misfortunes had made her holy in his eyes.

He gazed wistfully in her face, and as he did so, she saw that tears were coursing down his rough cheeks.

She interpreted the look truly, and bowed her head in her hands and wept. For a moment she continued thus. It was for a moment only ; then she rose, confronting him face to face, and meeting his look, eye to eye, firmly, fearlessly, and without blenching.

“ John, you shall hear my story. Do not

look at me ; look down, and do not raise your head until I have told you all. I have been wronged, but I have not sinned."

His hands were resting on the back of a chair, and he bent his head upon them ; and she, standing at his side, with her hand resting on his shoulder, in a voice low and tremulous, but which struck upon his ear with the distinctness of a trumpet call, told her story.

As she went on, his heart almost stood still, but he uttered not a sound. The frail chair snapped beneath the iron grip of his fingers—*that* alone told of the fierce feelings which he was keeping down. At last she paused, and the dragoon, mindful of his promise, did not raise his head. He waited to hear more, but the tale was ended.

There was a stifled sob—the next instant she was senseless at his feet. Tenderly as a mother would raise her infant, the veteran lifted her in his arms, and carrying her to her room, laid her on her own bed. Then he withdrew and sent the woman to her.

Steps were said to haunt that house ; and all that night long a heavy step paced up and down the corridor which led to the girl's room ;

but it was no phantom footstep, for John Munro kept unwearied watch there, pausing to listen, as he fancied that he heard some sound within, and then passing on, as the unbroken silence led him to believe it to be but an idle fancy.

At last the darkness of night gave place to the twilight of the coming day ; and not till then did John quit his post.

He went down stairs, and wandered through the house like one in a dream. He took note of nothing, but at times stood with his hands pressed against his head. More than an hour sped by, and the dim rooms began to grow cheerful with the rays of the morning sun.

In the midst of his reveries he was aroused by a shrill cry.

"John, come up here !" called out the woman. "As I believe in God, I am afraid the child is dead !"

John uttered a cry. For a moment he could not see, but reeled like one who had received a sudden blow, then rallying his energies, he hurried up the stairs and into the girl's room.

He found the woman's fears too true. The silence of the room, so very deathlike, that it

seemed to take its source from the calm figure that lay upon the bed, buried in its everlasting sleep, spoke the truth too clearly.

Every trace of the deep agony and despair which had rested on her features the night before, when she had recounted the story of her wrongs, had disappeared, and the pale face wore a smile as pure and beautiful as in life. Her hair lay loosely on her pillow, and her hands were clasped as if in prayer.

The room was as she left it when she fled. Her work-table stood near the bed, with the various trifles on it which showed her taste for what was beautiful. Her sketches on the wall, in their neat but homely frames, and every thing about, betokened her life and presence, except the cold and wasted form upon the bed, which too truly pointed out her eternal absence.

For a few moments, the soldier stood like one bewildered; but by degrees the expression of his face grew hard and stern, until its features seemed turned into stone. He went to the table, took a scissors from it, and cut off a lock of the dark, dishevelled hair. He pressed it to his lips, then raised it high aloft,

and with his eyes turned towards heaven, he registered a vow from which he never swerved.

CHAPTER II.

In a few days the house was shut up, and John Munro had left the place. A single person had met him at early dawn, with a small valise in his hand. To his enquiries the only reply he gave was that some unsettled business of Colonel Grafton's had called him away, and that he did not know when he should return.

From place to place he followed on the track of Captain Rivers, with an untiring determination that never slept. At length he learned that he was stationed with his regiment at a frontier town on the very verge of the wilderness, and thither he directed his course.

Late one afternoon he reached the place, and enquired for the house where the officer was quartered. Having, with a strange feeling of punctilliousness, divested himself of his usual dress, and donned his dragoon's uniform, he set out to fulfil his mission.

As he approached the house he heard the sound of boisterous merriment within, for Riv-

ers was entertaining some of his fellow-officers, and the revelry was running high.

Their gayety was interrupted by a sudden, sharp knock at the door of the room, and in reply to the summons to enter, the dragoon walked in.

For a moment he was dazzled by the lights, and looked around as if bewildered ; then he strode to the head of the table, where Rivers sat. There was something in the stern, resolute eye, and in the expression of concentrated wrath, kept down only by the fierce will of the man, that hushed the party into silence.

Rivers looked up with some surprise at the bold bearing of one wearing the uniform of a private soldier ; but did not recognize him, and rose instantly to resent the intrusion.

“ How, now, sir ! Is this a time and a manner in which to present yourself to your superior officer ? ”

“ I am here,” said John, in a slow, deliberate tone, “ to seek one Captain Rivers, and my business with him is such, that I must present myself to him where he is and as I am.”

“ I am he,” replied the officer, sharply, and evidently struggling to remember where he had

met the bold, sun-burnt man who stood before him.

"I know it well," replied the trooper; "I am John Munro, late of the United States Dragoons, the friend and comrade of Colonel Richard Grafton. You know me now, and may guess my errand; and, before this company, I call on you to defend your name, for I pronounce you to be a villain and a scoundrel."

With a cheek which had blanched to ashy whiteness, and with hands nervously grasping the back of the chair on which he leaned, Rivers confronted his accuser. His lips moved, but no sound escaped them. The stern, glowing eye which rested on his face without wavering, held him spellbound. Then, with an effort, he rallied himself, and breaking out into a loud laugh, said:

"Gentlemen, this worthy man I now recognize as a servant in the family of the girl of whom you have heard me speak, little Edith. I trust," said he, with a sneer, "that you will not judge her by her representative, for *she* is beautiful; what *he* is, you can judge for yourselves. Well, she threw herself in my way, and the result was, what happens every day. She

left me for reasons best known to herself ; and next in the order of the plot, this fellow presents himself as you have seen to-night. Now you know as much of the matter, and of John Munro, as I do. Having complied with his request, which was urged in a somewhat unceremonious manner, and which from another person I should have met in another way, I trust he will see the propriety of withdrawing."

As he spoke, his embarrassment gradually disappeared. He resumed his seat, and turning to the dragoon, whose eye he had hitherto avoided, he pointed to the door.

"You will leave my quarters."

John Munro had heard him out. He had made no attempt to interrupt or check him when he spoke, but his steady eyes never moved from his face.

"Captain Rivers," said he, in the same slow, deliberate tone in which he had spoken from the first, "I am no longer your inferior in rank. I have left the service, and now stand before you as an equal, as man to man, and before this company, I pronounce you to be a liar. You have sent as pure-hearted a lady as ever

lived to her grave, and you have added to your infamy by traducing her memory."

"Dead!" exclaimed Rivers.

John heard him not, but went on.

"In the service, when a wrong is done, the party injured, or his representative, has a right to redress, and I have come for it."

The blunt, bold bearing of the man carried with it a conviction of his truth; and even among those whom he had gathered about him, Rivers felt that his cause was a weak one, but his pride could not brook an encounter with one from the ranks, yet he moderated his tone as he spoke.

"It cannot be; your position forbids it. Any pecuniary atonement which I can offer——"

The trooper did not wait for him to finish, but without noticing his concluding words, he said:

"There was a time when to brand any man in the army, as I have branded you, would have roused even a coward to battle for his honor. What can come to a service where even its officers will tamely submit to epithets like these?"

Rivers rose hastily to his feet—"You have had my answer—begone!"

John Munro heeded him not, but turning to those about him, and towards whom hitherto he had not looked, he said :

“I know the respect which is due to you as officers, but I also know what is due to me. Had Captain Rivers been as careful of the rights of others as he is of his own, there never would have been a hard thought between us. But I came here for a purpose, and that purpose I will carry out, or leave my dead body where I stand. Yet, in the eyes of you, his friends, I would be justified in what I am to do.”

He paused as if to gather strength to go on.

“In many a hard-fought field I followed Colonel Richard Grafton, as bold an officer as ever led a soldier, and when he retired from the service I went with him, not as a servant, but as any friend may follow a gallant leader whom he reveres and loves. He told you the truth when he said that Colonel Grafton’s daughter was beautiful, but he lied most foully when he spoke aught against her purity. He came to her father’s house a stranger, and was received with open-handed hospitality, and he repaid it by asking the daughter of the host to

become his wife. He knew her too well to insult her by any other proposal. She consented, for she loved him. Then, on some plea or other, he urged a secret marriage. An accomplice was brought to her father's house while he was absent. A ceremony was performed, and she believed herself to be the wife of Captain Rivers. There never had been concealments between her and her father, and she begged of *that man*," said he, pointing to Rivers, "that there should be none then. Delay, deceit, subterfuge followed, until at last he threw off the mask, and told her that their marriage was a sham one.

"Gentlemen, I am not learned in law, and know not whether he told her the truth, but she believed him. That night she left her home, but not with him. She had few friends, and none of influence. This man had connections who were powerful; and he trusted to her obscurity and to their protection to escape the penalty of his crime. Her father had been in the service like your selves, and you may judge what his feelings were. He died of grief, and left his child to me—a sacred trust. I did not know her story then,

and—may God forgive me—I wronged her in my thoughts. But at last a heart-broken thing, she crept back to her home, and told me all. That night she died; and I sometimes fear that in the agony of her humiliation, she forgot her religion and her God, and died by her own hand.”

He dashed off the perspiration which stood in great drops on his brow, and went on.

“There is an instinct in the heart, which teaches every man to resent the wrongs of those he loves. It is living here,” said he, placing his finger on his brawny breast, “and calls on me to punish him who dragged her down. I had hoped when I came here,” said he, speaking slowly and in a distinct voice, that every word might tell, “that at least I would have found a *man* to deal with; but neither cowardice nor rank shall screen him now. I will show you how John Munro deals with such as he.”

He made a single stride to the officer, and pinioning his arms with a grasp that rendered him powerless, he dragged him to him, spat in his face, and flung him on the floor.

He eyed him for a moment, and then turned

to the door ; but Rivers sprang to his feet, and seizing a pistol which lay on the mantelpiece, he levelled it at the head of the dragoon. John Munro turned about, and faced him without blenching. Twice Rivers lowered it, and twice he raised it with a hesitating motion, but he did not fire ; and in another instant the weapon was wrested from his grasp by one of his comrades.

“ You ’re right,” said he, in a husky voice. “ Remove the table ; he shall have the chastisement he deserves. Hand me those swords. I suppose you can use them ? ” said he, bitterly.

“ *Any* weapon,” was the reply.

A sword was handed to him. He eyed it for a moment, while those present were engaged in removing the chairs and table, so as to give space to the combatants. He then placed it in a corner of the room, quietly took off his coat and waistcoat, and put them on a chair at his side. Rivers made the same preparations at the opposite side of the room. Not a word was spoken ; for the immovable features and resolved air of Munro showed plainly that interference, as far as he was concerned, would

be useless ; and the bitter insult which he had offered, was one which not one of them felt inclined to advise their comrade to brook.

“Gentlemen,” said the trooper, as he took his position, “before I go into this matter, from which both of us will not come out alive, I wish you to bear witness that I have given this man a fair field. I fight him with weapons of his own choosing. I have no second. If I go down,—be it so, but do not let my body be dishonored by his touch.”

One of the company who had stood by, a deeply interested spectator, got up ; he was little more than a boy, fresh from his home.

“It shall not be said that in such a quarrel you had no friend. I will see fair play.”

“It is well, and I thank you,” said the dragoon. “Now, sir, I am ready.”

His words were scarcely uttered when the blades crossed. Rivers was a good swordsman ; but the result was not in doubt for a single instant. Scarcely had the clash of steel sounded through the room before his weapon was struck from his grasp, and the sword of the dragoon passed through his body.

For a moment he stood grasping at the air,

and would have fallen, but that one of the officers caught him in his arms, and laid him gently on the floor. When they turned him over he was dead.

The dragoon stood for a moment bending over him. "With man his reckoning is past," said he, gloomily. "If, in what I have done, I have wronged him, he is now with One who will do him justice."

He went to the chair where he had left his clothes, put them on and walked out of the room.

The officer who had acted as his second followed him. He spoke in a hurried voice :

"You will find my horse saddled in the stable. Take him, and put as many miles as you can between you and this place before morning. Make for the town of D——, leave the horse at the inn there, and I will get him. Lose no time, for Captain Rivers has friends, who will not let this affair end here."

"It matters little now," replied the dragoon, "but still I thank you. I 'll take the horse and leave him as you wish."

The officer could hear his heavy tread long after the darkness had hidden him from his

sight. He listened, until the sound of horse's hoofs ringing on the hard soil told him that the dragoon was following his instructions.

* * * * *

John Munro never returned to the old house. But in after years, a soldier, who had known him, came there from the war in Mexico. He said that the troops spoke enthusiastically of a veteran who had served in that campaign. From the ranks he had risen to the command of a regiment; but he always wore a sad, abstracted air. At last he fell in battle, and before he was buried, curiosity led the soldier to the spot, and in the fallen officer he recognized John Munro.

A VISIT OF ST. NICHOLAS.

MANY years ago Sam Brett lived in an out-of-the-way nook on the banks of the Hudson, and at the base of one of the high mountains which overhang it.

He was so far away from neighbors, that those who took the trouble to think of him, and of his affairs, wondered why he went there, and how he contrived to live in such a spot.

His living, such as it was, he earned by ferrying persons across the river, for it was long before the time of steamboats and railroads.

Towns were small and far between in those days, and people were few ; so Sam had his neighborhood very much to himself. His family consisted of a cheery, bright-eyed wife, still young and handsome, and of a still more handsome and bright-eyed daughter.

The house was at the foot of the mountain, with a ragged road which led to it, and which

was distinguishable from the rest of the mountain only by the smaller size of the stones which filled it, and by the blazed trees which showed that an axe had been busy there, and that any one who might choose to follow the marks which it had made, would, in time, reach the spot to which those marks were intended to guide him.

More than one traveller who had stopped there, merely to be ferried across the river, tempted by the kindly host, was induced to ask a night's lodging, which was given freely and with an honest pride on all sides, as each member of the little household thought of what the other had done to make the place what it was.

Mrs. Brett declared that there was no other house like it on the whole river, and Sam declared that "go where they might" such sheets and beds could not be found in York State, "and he 'd like to know where they 'd find another river like the Hudson."

As he spake, he would wave his hand in a patronizing way back and forth towards the grand old river, with an air of proprietorship, as if it were as much a part of his place as the

house itself ; and, in truth, he was never able to divest himself of the idea that there was a feeling of intimate fellowship between him and the Hudson, which did not usually exist between men and rivers.

It was winter now, just on the eve of Christmas. The sky was cloudless ; the stars were shining brightly and dancing on the water ; the air was crisp and cold ; but the old river was not ice-bound as yet. It sparkled and rippled in the twilight which still flickered in the west, although all below, at the base of the mountain, was darkened by the shadows of the overhanging forests.

Sam's household was in a state of high excitement. Mrs. Brett had swept the hearth, and the fire was blazing brightly up the chimney. The tea-kettle was singing cheerily on the hob, and the table was spread with snowy linen, while around it hovered Mrs. Brett and Dolly, both in earnest consultation on some mysterious subject, and both casting anxious glances toward the door, as if they expected the arrival of somebody or something.

Soon there was a heavy tread, and the crackling of the crisp snow beneath it, and the brush-

ing of something against the door, as if it were being swept. Then there was an exclamation from Mrs. Brett, and a rush and flinging open the door on the part of Dolly; then a choking up of the doorway by something which looked like the ends of a dozen small trees, and finally Sam fought his way in, almost smothered with Christmas greens, which he flung upon the floor and came to the surface red and rosy from work.

"There they are," said he, triumphantly. "Now for supper! And then we will have a rousing time of it; Christmas morning must not shine on this house, little woman" (he always spoke to his wife in a diminutive way), "until these greens are in their places. We must honor the day, wife,—the greatest day that earth has ever seen. God blessed the world on that day, and may He bless you and darling Dolly and me—rough and uncouth as I am,—may God bless us all! Now, up with the supper."

While Sam held his fingers over the fire, and rubbed one hand over the other, Dolly and her mother were at work; and soon the supper was on the table. That was dispatched without

loss of time, for there was more important business on hand, and they could not linger at the meal.

The cloth was removed ; the dishes, cups, and knives and forks disappeared so quickly from the table that you could scarcely tell how they went ; and the Bretts were ready to commence at work for Christmas Eve.

Mrs. Brett was on her knees, selecting and arranging the different kinds of evergreens ; for there were holly, and laurel, and arbor vitæ, cypress, pine, and hemlock, besides vines of various kinds which Sam had gathered on the hills, and other plants, bearing red berries, which seemed to thrive even in winter.

Dolly was wondering how they should begin, and Sam was standing by quietly, his giant form towering above them like one of his own mountain pines, when without warning there was a sudden, sharp knock at the door.

“Gracious me !” exclaimed Mrs. Brett, “who’s that ?”

Dolly stood with her lips parted, her arms full of mistletoe, and her bright eyes glowing like two stars, but she said nothing.

Sam strode to the door. “Whoever you

are, you are welcome," said he, as he opened it.

A stranger stepped in ; and as he crossed the threshold, he raised his fur cap, an oddly shaped conical thing, with a feather in it.

"God's blessing on this house and all it holds," said he, in a tone which was quite solemn, and yet so cordial that all felt glad that he had uttered the words.

He stamped the snow from his feet and crushed the rime from his grizzled beard, for he was covered with frosty dew, like one who had come from some cold latitude.

As he looked about him and doffed a cloak well lined with fur, they had a full view of his person. He was short and stout, with cheeks of frosty red, eyes bright and glittering like diamonds, and a smile that seemed at once to spread cheerfulness throughout the room.

Sam wondered where he came from ; for in costume he differed from any one whom he had ever seen.

Dolly wondered how old he was, and, strange to say, she was sadly at fault ; for at times, as he was taking off his cloak and warming himself at the fire, as comfortably as if he were at

home, and had always been there, his face seemed changed : sometimes, notwithstanding his grizzled beard he looked almost as youthful as a boy ; and then again, as he gazed in the fire, apparently in thought, he seemed as old as if he had drifted down to their cottage from far-off centuries ; but through every change of look, there was upon his face the ever-present expression of good-will and love to man.

“ Wife,” said Sam, “ we have supped, but this stranger has not.”

“ Thanks for your offer,” said the stranger, “ I cannot linger here ; but before I journey on, I would help in the good work which you have on hand.”

As he spoke, he began to untie the bundles which Sam had brought in, and to arrange the greens around the walls. With an activity which seemed strange in one so old, and with a step so light that it scarcely touched the floor, he moved about the room hanging up the vines and fastening the evergreens along the walls.

Things flitted into their places, one could hardly tell how. The ivy was wreathed around the windows and clothes-presses. The chimney breast was hung with garlands—hemlock,

cypress, and red berries glittering like eyes from among the branches.

They all thought that the Christmas greens looked more green than they ever had looked before ; and never had they been so quickly and so tastefully arranged.

Even Dolly, with a slight feeling of jealousy (for she had always prided herself on her skill in arranging the house for this festal day), had to admit that the work of the stranger far excelled any she had ever done, and that never, on a Christmas Eve, had the house looked so bright as it did on that night.

The stranger seemed to know her thoughts, for he turned kindly towards her and said :

“ Don’t mind it, my child ! I have done this for years ; when you were an infant in your cradle, and in far-off times—too far for that little head of yours to dream of. It’s a happy work—happy, because it ushers in the day which brought peace and good-will to man ; happy, because it is the time when childhood reigns supreme. In it the aged go back to the days when with them all was hope, and sorrow had not come ; and in the young lives which cluster around their hearths, live their own

childhood over again. God bless the little ones of earth, as He does those of heaven ! And may He deal mercifully with those sad hearts which are left on earth, while their little ones are gathered in their Great Father's bosom ! ”

He spoke so reverently that Sam instinctively bowed his head. He turned to Sam.

“ The work is done,” said he ; “ and you must ferry me across the river at once.”

Mrs. Brett cast an anxious look towards the dark water, while Sam was struggling his way into his heavy overcoat, but she said nothing.

The stranger caught her look. “ He will be safe with me, and we are both safe in the care of Him whom you have honored this night ” ; and as Sam led the way to the door, their guest turned and said : “ May the morrow be a happy Christmas to you all ! ”

The next minute the door closed, and Sam's heavy footsteps were heard crushing along the frosty path which led to the river.

Mother and daughter both watched, until they saw the outline of the boat as it shot out upon the water ; and long after it had been hid in the gloom, they listened to the sturdy stroke of the oars pulled by Sam's stalwart arms.

The stranger was ferried across, and before stepping ashore reached out his hand to pay his fare.

Sam drew back. "You have done for me and mine this night what we could not have done for ourselves; and you have made our home, as far as hands could do it, more home-like than it has been for years. You owe me nothing; we owe you much; and if the good wishes of a plain, hard-working man are of any worth, you have them."

"Be it so," said the stranger; "yet take this little box, as a token of my good-will. It holds neither gold nor silver nor jewels, but it is what one friend may freely give and another may freely take. Open it in the morning, and *not before*; and now may God's benison be upon you!"

He reached out his hand, in which was a small wooden box. As it appeared to be of little value, Sam took it and placed it beside him in the boat.

"Now turn your boat homeward; for there are loving hearts waiting for the sound of your oars."

With these words the stranger turned away, and disappeared in the forest.

Sam followed his advice, and his oars soon brought him to his own shore, where he found Dolly and his wife on the look-out for his coming.

As they heard his footstep, the door was thrown open, and both were on the threshold ready to hear what he had to tell of the guest, who had come and gone so strangely, and yet had left such a feeling of good-will towards himself behind him.

Sam told them what had passed, and showed the box which had been given him. He also mentioned his promise not to open it until morning.

Dolly examined it with much curiosity. It was very small, and easily held in her hand, and was closed only by a simple clasp. She wondered what could be in it, and thought it very inconsiderate in the old gentleman to affix such a condition to the gift. She held it up to the light and tried to look through it, but she could see nothing; then she placed it against the end of her nose, but there was no odor. She touched it with the tip of her tongue, but there was no taste to it.

She did not venture to touch the clasp, be-

cause her father had said: "My child, the man who gave me this said, 'Open it in the morning, and not before.' It was a free gift, and we must honor the giver."

Dolly acquiesced, and placed the box upon the table, where it remained until the house was locked up and they all went to bed.

Before the lights were put out Dolly cast a lingering look at it, and said she hoped that nothing would happen to it during the night, and that they would find it safe and sound in the morning.

But do what she would, all the night long that box kept running through her head, interfering with her prayers and mixing up with her dreams.

In truth, the thoughts of all ran much upon their guest; his unexpected arrival and departure, and his parting gift, and the condition annexed to it.

By sunrise on the next day Dolly found her way into the room where the box had been left.

The shutters were closed, and it was so dark that she had to grope her way to the window to let in the light. Then she turned to look at the box.

"Goodness sakes alive!" was her exclamation. "Father! father! come here quick, quick!"

Sam was an early riser, and he hurried down stairs followed by his wife.

Dolly pointed to the box, which still stood on the table.

They walked around it in profound amazement; for there it was looming up in size like a small house, yet in shape and in every thing but magnitude it was the very box which they had left on the table the night before.

They swarmed about it like ants around some choice morsel so large that they dared not meddle with it.

At last Sam said: "He who gave us this was a good man, and would not harm us. I, for one, will trust him; and come what may, I'll open it, big as it has grown to be, and we'll soon see what comes of it."

Sam mounted on the table and touched the spring. The lid flew open, and he forthwith plunged his hand into the trunk.

Out came a cloth on which was written in large letters: "*The gift of Santa Claus.*"

Dolly and her mother were now on the alert.

Quick, Sam, what comes next?

Next Sam brought out a bundle which seemed to be made up of silk and ribbons, and of a shape to him unknown.

"This is beyond me," said he, as he held it up and viewed it with wondering eyes.

His wife and Dolly fairly danced with pleasure.

"Why, Sam! Don't you know what it is? It's a beautiful gown. Ods sakes-alive!" said she, as she took it from him and wrapped it around her person, and twisted herself almost into a corkscrew to see how it fitted behind. "Who would have thought that Nancy Brett, the ferryman's wife, would have owned a thing like that. Now look and see what there is for Dolly."

Again Sam plunged into the trunk. This time he brought out a package, flat and square. It looked liked a book. It was wrapped in paper. Dolly took it from her father's hand, and untied the strings which were around it, while her parents watched as eagerly as their daughter, to see what it might be.

As she opened it Dolly uttered a faint cry, and then her face grew rosy red. It was the

miniature of a young man, who seemed to look at them with frank and honest eyes.

“What’s this?” said Sam, as he took up a scrap of paper which was enclosed in it. On it was written: “A gift for darling Dolly—All’s well.”

“God bless me!” said Sam, looking at the miniature. “It’s very strange. Methinks I have seen this face before, but where I cannot tell.”

If Dolly knew, she held her peace.

Again Sam returned to the trunk, from which he drew articles of various kinds; some for himself, some for his wife, and not a few for Dolly.

They were placed around the room, and it seemed a marvel how a trunk of that size could have contained all that had come out of it.

They all agreed that on no Christmas-day had their home been so beautiful as it then was; and many were the blessings which they showered upon their strange guest.

After a while a search was made for the miniature, but in some mysterious way it had disappeared; although Sam and his wife rummaged for it among all the furniture and odds and ends which were scattered about the room.

Perhaps, if they had searched a large pocket which was attached to Dolly's gown they might have found it.

But there was much to be done on Christmas-day, and they separated to attend to their different duties, all not a little proud of the gay appearance of their home.

Dolly went to her room and locked the door. Then she drew the miniature from her pocket and kissed it.

She was interrupted by a loud shout, from without, from Sam.

"By the living Jingo, there's a new boat at the shore with my name painted on it in letters as big as my hand. 'A gift to Sam Brett from Santa Claus.' Hooroar, hooroar!" and he burst into the house, his face radiant with satisfaction.

They all went to look at the boat; and decided that never had there been so fine a boat as that one, nor so good a friend as their guest of the previous evening.

All day long they talked and thought of nothing else. Dolly did not say as much as the others, but she thought a great deal more. At last when the sun went down, and the even-

ing shadows were creeping through the room, there was a sharp knock at the door. Dolly and her mother were there, but her father was at the shore busy with his boat.

"Come in," was the response to the knock.

The door opened, and a young man entered. He looked around the room, then walked up to Dolly and reached out his hand.

"You see, Dolly," said he, "that I have come to keep the promise made long years ago; will you take me now—as you promised to do then?"

For a few moments Dolly seemed bewildered, and the red blood mounted to her cheeks; then rising from her seat she led him to Mrs. Brett.

"Mother, this is my old play-fellow, William Chester; I hope you have not forgotten him."

Mrs. Brett took his hand and told him that she remembered him well; and welcomed him to their home.

Just then Sam's burly figure passed the window and he came into the room.

He was full of news about his boat, and of her beauty and merits; but before he had time to speak his eyes rested on the stranger, and he stopped short.

"Father," said Dolly, "this is William Chester. He has been abroad for many years, and has returned just now. You knew his father, Richard Chester."

"What!" exclaimed Sam, as he grasped the hand of the young man. "A son of Dick Chester, my old and best friend. You are welcome here, and to all that I have; for your father helped me in my hour of need; and all that I can do for him and his, I will do with all my heart! Are you the little chap who used to hang about my boat years ago, and who spilled my tar and kicked my dog?"

The stranger laughed. "I did all that in those days, and there is one thing more, that I did then, which you have not mentioned, and perhaps have not found out. I learned to love your daughter, Dolly, and I believe that she then learned to love me. We have neither of us forgotten our lesson. Give her to me for a Christmas gift! I am well off and will give her a happy home."

Sam was perfectly bewildered. "Bless me!" exclaimed he. "Give you my Dolly for a Christmas gift? Why, she is but a child—not grown up—*very* little more than a baby. I never dreamed of this."

He turned to his wife : " Is n't this very strange ? And Dolly *is* so very young."

" Not very," was the prompt reply. " I was just of Dolly's age when you took me."

" God bless me ! Is that so, Nancy ?"

" She is twenty years old : and so was I."

" Well, well !" said Sam, apparently somewhat shaken by this stubborn fact. " What shall I do ?"

" Let him have her," was the ready answer. " He comes of a good stock ; and years ago, when they were but boy and girl playing together, I sometimes suspected this, and have kept trace of him ever since. He is honest and true. Give them your blessing, and I shall give him mine."

" So be it," said Sam. And he rose and put Dolly's hand into that of his young guest.

" I 'll trust her with you, although you *did* spill my tar and kick my dog.

And thus ended the visit of St. Nicholas.

LITTLE SHARPSHINS.

A Child's Story.

A LONG time ago three little children lived with their mother in a cottage, over which honeysuckles and wild roses clambered and hung down from the roof-top, filling the air with their perfume. Near this cottage was a small lake, where the water lilies floated among green leaves. The trees on its borders drooped their branches into the water, through which the gold-fish darted like streaks of flame.

The youngest of these children was a pale, puny little fellow, with golden hair, and great eyes which looked from beneath his hair like stars ; and who was forever gazing in the sky, as if looking for the great heaven which lay beyond.

He was so thin and feeble that his brother and sister called him Little Sharpshins ; and after a while his mother called him so too ; and

then all the neighbors did so, until at last he was known by no other name.

His brother's name was Dick—but, poor fellow ! he was lame, and hobbled about on a crutch.

He was a noble boy, merry as a cricket ; very fond of Little Sharpshins ; and had any danger threatened him would have battled for him against an army.

Dick was the eldest of the three ; next was Mary, a girl five years old, who had the same golden hair as Little Sharpshins.

They both looked up to Dick as one of the greatest heroes in the world, and felt that with him as a protector no harm could ever befall them.

But one day as little Mary was walking on the bank of the lake, her foot slipped and she fell in.

Dick heard her cry, and reached the place only in time to see her sinking beneath the water.

He could not swim ; but he knew no fear. He sprang in after her, and struggled on until he got her in his arms ; but he could not save her, and they sank together.

They were found and buried ; but it seemed very strange to Little Sharpshins to be left alone, and he was forever asking his mother about Mary and Dick, and where they were gone, and when he would see them again ; for he was very lonely without them.

Sometimes to amuse him his mother made some suds, and brought him a little pipe, with which he blew soap bubbles, and watched them as they floated out of the window and up into the blue sky, while he wondered whether they ever reached heaven before they stopped.

One day he took his pipe, dipped it into the suds, and blew.

From the pipe came forth a bubble ; it grew larger and larger. Still he blew on until it grew so great that it encircled the chair in which he sat.

He could not tell how it came to pass, but soon he found himself inside the bubble, while it rose slowly and gently, bearing him along with it, and floated out of the window into the bright sunshine.

Still upward it went, until it reached the tops of the trees, and then they were left behind, and Little Sharpshins saw that the earth

was going away and the clouds were coming near.

He was not in the least frightened, but he fixed his great eyes on the sky and wondered whether this were the road to heaven.

On went the bubble. The clouds were passed and lay beneath him, like great banks of snow, shutting out all sight of earth ; but far above all was the still blue sky ; and oh, how still it was ! and in the dim distance he could see a region far different from that which he had left — fields glorious with flowers, and trees and rivers, such as he had never seen on earth.

The bubble floated on, until it seemed to rest upon a bed of flowers ; and around him were angel forms and faces, such as he had heard his mother speak of ; and had sometimes seen in his dreams ; and among them he saw little Dick and Mary.

There was no crutch needed now ; no feeble gait, nor sunken cheek, for both were gloriously beautiful ; and as they put their arms around him and kissed him, and called him their dear Little Sharpshins, he asked them if they were angels, and if they still loved him, poor and feeble as he was. They told him that their life was love ;

and they twined their arms around him as they had done on earth, and Little Sharpshins thought what a glorious place heaven must be, where he would always have Dick and Mary with him.

But the bubble floated on, and they told him that he must return again to earth.

The tears came into his eyes, but they gave him words of cheer, and with the sadness of his departure came a strange feeling of peace, such as he had never felt before.

The bubble floated earthward again, and Little Sharpshins watched and watched the forms of Dick and Mary, as they stood waving their hands to him, until they faded away in the distance, and he could see nothing of their outlines except two bright spots like stars.

Slowly through the sky and through the clouds the bubble sank to earth, with a motion so gentle that Little Sharpshins fell asleep, and awakened only to find himself in his own bed in his own little room.

He told his mother what he had seen ; but she said that he had been dreaming.

Sharpshins shook his head and smiled, and said if it was a dream he was glad that he had

dreamed it, for now he knew where Dick and Mary were, and he would join them soon.

"God forbid!" said his mother, with a startled look, and she gathered him to her bosom as if to shield him from that last dread foe.

But no human love can keep that foe away.

Sharpshins grew more feeble day after day, and spent much of his time in his little chair, looking at the sky.

One day he was sitting thus, his breath coming slowly and wearily, and by his side sat his mother holding his hand in hers.

"Mother," said he, "bring my pipe and blow a bubble. Perhaps it will go up to brother Dick and sister Mary, and they will think of me when they see it, and will come down to me, as I went up to them."

His mother made the suds and got the pipe and blew a bubble. It floated around the room and around the bed and at last it sailed out through the open window and up into the blue sky, until it was lost to sight.

Little Sharpshins watched it with eager eyes, and listened, as if he expected to hear voices. At last he laid his head wearily upon his pillow. Then he said suddenly :

“Mother, take me in your arms, and let me blow a bubble and send a message to brother Dick; I know he ’ll answer me.”

His mother took him in her arms, dipped the pipe in the suds and held the stem to his lips, but Sharpshins took it in his own hands, and put it to his lips, and from the bowl came forth a bubble so gorgeous and beautiful that it seemed to form a rainbow around him. Then it broke from the pipe and floated through the room, circling around the two, and while his mother looked, she saw within it two little figures. Could it be ! Little Dick and Mary were there, smiling and beckoning to her.

The tears gushed from her eyes, and for a moment she could see nothing, and the pipe fell from Little Sharpshin’s hand, clattering on the floor. When she looked again the bubble was floating through the window, and between the two little figures was a third one—Little Sharpshins,—with an arm around the neck of each, and their arms twined about him.

As the bubble floated upward in the sky it bore the three aloft.

She gathered her little boy closely to her breast, to be sure that she had him there, and

watched the bubble as it went higher and higher, until it seemed like a star in the sky, and disappeared altogether.

She bent gently over Little Sharpshins and kissed his pale cheek.

"What a beautiful bubble you blew, my child!" she said.

There was no reply. A mass of golden tresses was hanging over her shoulder; the great eyes were closed; there was a smile of happiness about the lips, but Little Sharpshins spoke no more. He had gone to the far-off land forever.

END.





